The Reconstructionist
Volume 67, Number 2, Spring 2003

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From the Editor

One of the less well-known pieces of Mordecai Kaplan's vision of a reconstructed Jewish community was his hope that American Jewish life could be recreated through a series of local, organic Jewish communities organized under the heading "Judaism as a civilization." In Kaplan's vision (or "fantasy," as many of his early followers admitted), instead of having Jews pay dues to a synagogue, fees to a JCC, tuition to a Talmud Torah or religious school and honoraria to clergy for life-cycle officiation, Jews would pay one yearly "membership" in the local Jewish community. In return, this democratically governed community, through its administrative apparatus, would fund the range of services needed by the community, and each member would have access to whatever programs, services, classes or ritual needs might arise.

Needless to say, nearly seventy years after the publication of Kaplan's *Judaism As A Civilization* (1934), few large or small Jewish communities resemble anything like an organic Jewish community. The ongoing disarray at the United Jewish Communities (UJC) as it attempts to define its mission and develop a model of governance, representation and decision-making is perhaps the most current evidence of the American Jewish community's inability to evolve a model of efficient and effective organization.

The issues that once comprised the communal debate are fading. The triangulated relationship of Federation-synagogue-Jewish community center, in which each claimed primacy, has shifted to a more centralized agenda in which Jewish "continuity" (the term of the 1990s) or Jewish "renaissance" (the current appellation) drives dollars and decisions. Concern about diminishing identification as Jews by Gen X'ers and those coming up behind them, the "Millenials," has engendered an atmosphere of anxiety. The current economic downturn, coupled with rapidly changing patterns of giving by Jews in their '40s, '50s and '60s, affects the level of support upon which agencies, Federations, synagogues and schools can rely. In what is often referred to as a "culture of scarcity," thoughtfully anticipating trends and planning for them seem a luxury.

At the same time, organizations that reflected the needs and interests, as well as the social and economic realities, of second-, third- and fourth-generation American Jews are facing a decline. Avenues of association that stirred earlier generations — the "defense" agencies (AJ Committee, AJ Congress, the ADL); the Zionist organizations (Hadassah, ZOA); the "fraternal" associations (B'nai Brith) — are not growing, and are finding it difficult to replenish their aging membership ranks.

If we measured Jewish identification, affiliation and engagement by the ability of the network of organizations of the American Jewish community

to maintain their agendas and retain their members, we might well despair about the future.

In this issue, however, we offer several extended and thoughtful analyses of general as well as specific areas where the reconstruction of the American Jewish community might yet occur. A common thread in these provocative pieces is the need for agencies, federations, synagogues and other institutions of the Jewish community to face honestly their challenges. Rather than lament what has been, we are challenged to face boldly the demands — and opportunities — that the new generations of Jews present. Responding to their needs, on their terms, in language that speaks to them, is central.

A second common point in these discussions is the absence of agreement about what comprises identity, how it is measured, and what strategies can be effective in strengthening Jewish identity. Visionary synagogues, federations and organizations have retooled their mission, program and purpose to respond to the increasingly evident reality that Jewish identity is characterized by two non-negotiables: a sense of "journey," and an assumption of the right to make personal choices as to how, when and with whom one's Jewishness will be acted out.

Whatever directions emerge for the 21st century American Jewish community, the reconstruction of the institutions that embody that community will inevitably have to occur. As our writers indicate, adaptation is the governing principle of evolution. And after all, if Judaism is the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people, then we can at least have the faith that our generation — one blessed with almost unlimited Jewish resources, living under freedom — will find its way to a model of community that can embody the new ways that Judaism and Jewishness will emerge.

We wish our readers a relaxing summer.

— Richard Hirsh

Understanding the Moving Target of Jewish Organizational Life in America

By Carl A. Sheingold

How have American Jews organized themselves in the past, and how will they in the future? This is a challenging question because the subject is a moving target. All Jewish organizations are involved in what sometimes feels like a continuous process of change as they respond to the paradoxical nature of Jewish life in America. For most individual Jews, security, success and thorough absorption of American culture have made our identity as Jews a subjective, fluid and, for many, problematic matter of choice.

If most American Jews view their Jewish identity through an individualistic lens, they view the role of organizations in their lives through the lens of the marketplace and the question of how an organization can meet their changing needs. It is no wonder that organizations seeking to engender commitment and affiliation find themselves rethinking their purposes and modes of operation.

New Frameworks

If organizations are changing, our framework for understanding them as well as their relationships to each other — the broader organizational structure of the community — needs to change as well. This will be the focus of this essay. But first, a few more words about the context, which is really what Mordecai Kaplan prophetically described as the challenge of living in two civilizations.

Jewish institutions have responded to this challenge in different ways, but for all it is the central concern, including even those parts of the Orthodox world who seek to insulate themselves from it. Nor is this a new subject; we've been talking about it for decades. It is part of the unfolding of American Jewish history, not a problem leading to a short-term plan and solution.

One of many changes since Kaplan's time is the scope of this challenge. The

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influence of the American culture of individualism, or, perhaps better put, modern or post-modern culture with America in the lead, is a worldwide phenomenon. No society is immune from its appeal and/or threat to more traditional, communally-based cultures and impulses. This is not a narrow or parochial story. The tension that is at the heart of Jewish life in America — between the community and the individual — is, in a broader global sense, the central drama of our time.

Organizational Change

All of Jewish organizational life has been changing over recent decades. The message of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study — that Jewish identity and affiliation had to be built as much as built upon — is often referred to as the spark behind this movement toward organizational change. This was surely not the case for religious and educational institutions that have been grappling with these issues for decades. But the population study did spark organizational reassessment in what had been thought of as "secular" institutions — in a sense, it served to enable their leaders to bring into boardroom discussions a phenomenon that had surely entered their personal and family lives some years before.

The result was that organizations that previously took Jewish identification for granted began to explore the necessity of making that issue — and therefore Jewish content and Jewish education — part of their mission. Community-relations and advocacy organizations began to explore ways in which uninvolved Jews who cared about community-relations issues (social justice, the environment, etc.) could discover a personal Jewish connection by encountering the Jewish bases of such concerns and working on them under Jewish auspices. Community centers began to increase the Jewish content of their programs and incorporate Jewish education into their missions.

Federations and Agencies

There has also been an impact on inter-organizational relations. The most obvious example is the movement of Federations to develop relationships with synagogues. Previously, though Federations spoke expansively about their role as the "central" communal agency; the "family" of agencies to which they allocated funds did not include synagogues. The dynamics and potential consequences of an engagement between these two core sectors of Jewish life go very deep, even when the first programmatic steps seem tentative.

Federations were built by identifying issues and causes, primarily in the area of social services here and overseas, around which all Jews could unite — indeed, such issues were seen as vehicles for fostering unity. The purposes supported by Federation allocations were tangible. The promised impact of one's gift could be concretely described and plausibly achieved (e.g., paying for a flight to Israel for a Jew in danger or helping to fund a home for the aged).

The new issues, involving identity and education, may have prompted efforts to

broaden "the family," but they also represented a major challenge on all sides. To Federation leadership, the new agenda could seem vague and, in any case, not amenable to sure solutions (not to mention being a potential threat to overseas allocations, which was the traditional fulcrum of the Federation campaign.)

On the synagogue side, it meant dealing with a new agenda in the community that simultaneously suggested the importance of congregations and promised funding, but also represented an implicit critique of prior functioning. The intrinsically ideological nature of synagogues and the consensus-seeking nature of Federations also suggested a source of tension and mutual distancing.

Changing Roles of Professionals

There are also interesting dynamics in this relationship at the professional level. When these two sectors were insulated from each other and the religious/secular distinction could be thought of as a rigid and clear divide, rabbis and federation executives could each imagine that "the community" was about their work and "communal leadership" was about them. There may have been resentment about the claims of the others, but it was of small practical consequence.

Now, with fluid boundaries, tensions might rise, but the potential for a serious engagement with the meaning of "community" and "leadership" was also possible. Though the very different cultures of Federations and synagogues can create challenges to building a relationship, that very difference suggests the potential for a relationship that is more complementary than competitive.

There are other examples of potential inter-organizational relationships where the balance may at least be perceived to be different. For example, the potential for collaboration between synagogues and community centers is great. There are certainly individuals for whom center membership, including exposure to Jewish education there, can be a first step toward synagogue membership. But one can also imagine centers expanding their role in the area of Jewish rituals in ways that might seem highly competitive with synagogues. The existence of Hillel-sponsored High Holiday services on college campuses that are attended by more community members than students is suggestive in this regard.

Fluid Boundaries

These examples are a reflection not just of the increasingly fluid boundaries between organizational missions, but also of the fluidity of individual identities. If the religious/secular divide is, to say the least, no longer a rigid distinction for organizations, the same is true for individual identities, including ideological/denominational identities. It is probably the case today that more than half of American Jews switch denominations in their lifetime.

Researchers now see Jewish identity development more as a "journey," rather than as a static characteristic to be measured by a survey. Indeed, the definition of Jewish identity, and the prior issue of defining who is a Jew, have

become major bones of contention in survey research and demographic studies. The fluidity of Jewish identity also suggests the potential for greater competition among synagogues and within and among denominations, along with the potential for learning from each other.

Changing Fundraising Dynamics

Other features of this new environment for Jewish organizations flow from the changing dynamics of fundraising. In an era of community and obligation, fundraising was about eliciting the financial consequences of loyalty — to the community, to a particular institution or, at the national level, to a type of institution. Now it is more individualistic, particularly at the upper reaches of giving.

The consequences of this are particularly salient for Federations, whose annual campaigns were built on the idea of the gift as a communal obligation. Now, Federations must respond to a philanthropic marketplace in which donors focus more on what they care about than on what someone else might think their obligations might be; and, in any case, they resist the abstractness and lack of donor control in giving to an umbrella campaign. It is no accident that Federation endowments, which provide the opportunity for more designated gifts, are growing as annual campaigns struggle.

Perhaps the most important trend in Jewish philanthropy is not only the increased independence of mega-donors, but also that these donors increasingly see themselves as agents of change, with many focusing precisely on fostering Jewish identity, particularly among young people. In this context, mega-donors rarely focus on only one institutional system, often distance themselves from the governance of institutions and, indeed, sometimes create their own.

Independent Philanthropy

We can even say that in this period, Jewish philanthropy must be treated as an independent and profoundly influential sector of the community, as much as a source of support for other sectors. This, in combination with a broadening of the Federation agenda, has opened up new possibilities for the funding of institutions, but it also has resulted in competition among them for support. And it has made the relationship between the philanthropic sector and other sectors a major, evolving dynamic in Jewish life.

The story of Birthright Israel — a program providing free trips to Israel to young people, particularly the Jewishly uninvolved — is a case in point. It was an initiative of independent donors who took the lead in a self-consciously entrepreneurial sprit. They did not wait for permission, or go through a lengthy communal process. They were proud of the risks involved and said that if it failed, they were prepared to try something else. Yet they sought partnership from Federations in regard to funding. And, more generally, the long-term impact of the program depends greatly on the ability of mainstream organizations to absorb what seems to be the program's positive short-

term Jewish impact on participants.

Business Thinking

The Birthright story also illustrates a more general implication of the effect of American culture on Jewish organizational life, namely, the increasing impact of business thinking, business language and business models in guiding organizational development. Business consultants, and many more using business tools, play a prominent role in guiding some organizations through processes of change. Business models and standards are used by board members to evaluate organizational functioning and executive tenure (even of rabbis, who may not think of themselves as "executives").

Business language and techniques — e.g., viewing members as customers, finding the right "market niche" as a goal, and using marketing techniques — have become commonplace. Many donors see their gifts as investments more than as acts of loyalty, ask investment-related questions before giving, and seek accountability after giving. Even the issue of competition alluded to above is seen as a goad to organizational effectiveness, more than as a challenge to organizational survival. Organizational survival is theoretically at stake, but, from a marketplace perspective, this can be seen as having salutary consequences.

Communal Bottom Line

Communal organizations are learning valuable lessons from the business world regarding organizational functioning and change. What follows is not intended to discount or trivialize that. But our communal institutions are not only businesses. And this goes beyond the sense in which all non-profit organizations are distinct from businesses in being mission-driven — having, in a sense, a dual bottom line.

In communal organizations, part of the mission is to serve and often to be a historically rooted community. In a business, abandoning a market because it no longer makes business sense is an essential strategy. But a community cannot casually say, for example, to members who liked the old center, or the way the synagogue or women's division used to function, "Go find another place; we're going after the new market" (not to mention a new sacred text to supplant the original). In other and business words, the degree of alignment that can be achieved in a communal institution between its financial base and its mission is, by definition, more limited than is the case for businesses. At the same time, communal organizations must find ways to reach new markets, in generational and other terms.

Transparency

To take another example, what in the business world is called "transparency" regarding organizational functioning — particularly, having timely, accurate and accessible knowledge of successes and failures — is essential and, in some sense, doable. In a communal organization depending on vol-

untary donations for financial survival, transparency is a dicey proposition, especially insofar as donors want to be associated with success rather than failure.

And this goes deeper than may be immediately apparent. An "as if" relationship to the question of belief — for example, studying sacred texts "as if" one believes in God, while one's actual theological stance may be much less certain — is an important theological option in the modern age. So some degree of myth-making and myth-believing is essential to building and sustaining community. In neither case is it necessarily a reflection of dishonesty. It is often a reflection of the non-rational nature of some of the things we seek in community.

Think of the nightmares created by individuals who cause hurt all around them and justify it by saying, "I'm just being honest." Or the nightmare of family life conducted with the ideal of full transparency: no myths, or "fooling ourselves" about what a special family we are, are to be permitted. And yet, to push the analogy, some degree of transparency is inevitable and essential in family life in the modern information age. There are far fewer things we can hide from ourselves or our children, even if we wish to do so.

A Challenge to Leadership

The information age has other implications for organizational life. We are overloaded with information. An increased transparency (which is not identical to wisdom or understanding) regarding the lives of others, organizations, politics and society is a cultural fact. Individuals do not have to desire it to be exposed to it. And we would not want it otherwise. In this context, however, it is no accident that being an organizational leader is challenging, particularly where there is a diversity of constituents and funders.

There is a similar challenge to leadership from the demand for organizations to be flexible and change oriented. We need to develop more flexible models for the functioning of our communal institutions, but at the end of the day, organizations by their very nature cannot continuously change. And this is not only a reflection of a values-based sense of obligation to diverse interests and traditions. Any major change takes a long time to work out, and requires experiments that may fail as well as succeed.

An example that is also a metaphor for this problem arises when donors provide seed money for a new program, but build in their unwillingness to provide funding beyond a few years. There is merit to their desire not to create a dependency relationship and, in a sense, to test the merit of the program in the philanthropic marketplace.

But often the leaders of creative initiatives find that just when they have finally figured out what to do and how do to it, funding runs out. They then must find new sources of funding, sources that often are precisely interested in connecting to something new, rather than enabling some other funder's idea to have the time really to flourish.

Identity and Community: Current Organizing Concerns of the Jewish Community

By David A. Teutsch

In recent years, we have watched the organized American Jewish community turn its attention from European Jewish refugees, to the defense and survival of the State of Israel, to responding to the rapidly rising intermarriage rate, to "Jewish Continuity," to "Jewish Renaissance."

As we have moved through these changes in Jewish communal attention and terminology, we have seen a gradual but steady increase in concern with the intensification of North American Jewish life on the part of such Jewish institutions as Federations, Jewish community centers, Jewish family-service agencies and others. Today, the emphasis heard most often is on strengthening Jewish identity and intensifying Jewish community. What, precisely, do these terms mean, and what would it mean to succeed at these goals?

Defining And Measuring

Identity is a concept elusive to define and even more difficult to measure.[1] Several telling metaphors can be used to describe identity. In one of these, identity is like an onion — a series of layers, each of which can be peeled away until there is no identity left. In another metaphor, identity is like a peach — there is a soft outer part, and then there is a solid and almost impenetrable core. In a third, identity is more like an orange — there is an apparently strong exterior, but a highly segmented interior, with each aspect of identity remaining relatively separate from the rest.

Given the highly interactive nature of the different aspects of identity, it seems to me that these metaphors are extremely flawed. The different parts of ourselves are interrelated and difficult to separate. Strengthening any particular aspect of identity is, therefore, a daunting task because of the complex nature and multiple dimensions of identity. We respond to individuals and to issues not because of a single aspect of identity but because of many.

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Primary and Secondary Identities

Leaders in the Jewish community often assume that it is a reasonable communal goal for American Jews to make their Jewish identity primary. Several years ago, at a commission meeting of the Council of Jewish Federations (now the United Jewish Communities), I suggested that Jewish identity is, in fact, a secondary identity for most American Jews, who after all speak English, work in the secular economy, and enjoy the cultural and leisure-time activities shared by most other Americans.

Many of the leaders in the room responded with anger and consternation, as if that statement were prescriptive or a self-fulfilling prophecy, but it is hardly a fresh insight. As Mordecai Kaplan put it in 1934:

> Since the civilization that can satisfy the primary interests of the Jew must necessarily be the civilization of the country he lives in, the Jew in America will be first and foremost an American and only secondarily a Jew.[2]

But identity in our time is not so simple as Kaplan suggests. Shedding our illusions is a necessary step in formulating good policy.

Multiple Dimensions

My identity, for example, includes being a man, a Jew, an American, a descendent of refugees, a rabbi, a professor, a husband, a father, a heterosexual, a white ethnic, a bicyclist, a member of the upper middle class and a person of middle age, to name but a few major aspects. Which aspect of one's identity is primary at any given moment reflects the particular activity in which one is engaged, as well as the social context. When attending a sports event, for example, I think of myself as an American.

In some situations more than one aspect of one's identity emerges. For example, in discussing life in Israel, I react as an American deeply rooted in democratic and liberal values, while reacting simultaneously as a Jew deeply concerned with Zion, and also as someone who has spent time in Israel and has friends and colleagues there. I also think about the painful situation of Israeli soldiers, sympathize with their situation, and remember my relief when I learned that I had a high enough draft number to exempt me from conscription during the Vietnam War.

From minute to minute, it is difficult to have the extraordinary self-awareness required to recognize all the parts of our compound identities that come up in various situations. Complex interactions among different parts of each person's identity are typical of the modern and post-modern situation, because having a compound identity is the basic condition of living in post-modern society.

Measuring Behavior or Identity?

We might be able to make reasonable guesses about which aspects of identity would be primary in a particular workplace or social group. We could probably do that in a women's consciousness-raising group or a Hebrew

class. But in many situations, it is difficult to predict. That difficulty is compounded if one is trying to measure identity in an abstract way.

One of the reasons why the 1990 and as yet unreleased 2000 National Jewish Population Study undertaken by the United Jewish Communities have placed such an emphasis on indicators such as lighting Hanukah candles, attending Shabbat services, fasting on Yom Kippur, and reading Jewish periodicals is that measuring behavior is much easier than measuring identity. The assumption underlying such surveys is that Jewish behavior and Jewish identity correlate with each other.

However, the degree to which behavior is produced by a single aspect of identity is unclear at best. After all, our choices regarding activities in which to participate reflect opportunity, social groupings, family background, career advancement, ease of access, quality of offerings, personal aesthetic taste, cost, and a host of other factors. Only one of these factors is Jewish identity. Slight changes in the mix might have a major impact on the Jewish activity level. Therefore, it is tricky to assume that we understand the level of Jewish identity from studies based on activity. Most sociological studies of American Jewry reflect this difficulty.

Entry Point for Strengthening Identity?

Since the nature of identity is complex, what can be undertaken effectively to strengthen one aspect of it is uncertain, and the impact of efforts to strengthen Jewish identity is difficult to measure. What indicators might we use? We might look to see with whom people associate. We might look at what they are doing in terms of educational and programmatic activities. We might look at their volunteer commitments. If, over time, these show increasing Jewish activity, it may be reasonable to claim that identity is becoming strengthened.

But that will be impossible to know unless there are carefully constructed control groups not part of these programs so that changes can be isolated from non-programmatic influences. Self-reporting on feelings and attitudes can be misleading, because people do not necessarily keep good track of their internal changes and often report what they think the listener wants to hear. Control groups can help with this as well.

Affirmative Activities

Increased social contacts and friendships with Jews may strengthen Jewish identity. Thus, outreach programs and programs designed to increase interpersonal connections may help with Jewish identity. Opportunities for study that increase knowledge of Jewish history and practice may strengthen Jewish identification through increased familiarity. Aesthetically pleasing worship experiences may attract more people and provide more of a sense of Jewish belonging and, perhaps, a greater sense of Jewish spirituality. Reading Jewish books that are engaging, having powerful experiences like trips to Israel, and Jewish summer camping all show signs

that they strengthen Jewish identity. How, exactly, this happens, how long the effects last, and how we measure them remain matters of conjecture. Control-group longitudinal studies alone can provide greater certainty.

When confronted with anti-Semitism, Jews often spend more time around Jews. Their awareness of their Jewish identity increases. Does this strengthen identity or only increase Jewish activity? Is it the basis for positive identity formation or some more ambivalent form? When someone becomes active on the board of the local art museum and therefore spends less time doing volunteer work for Jewish organizations, does this reflect a weakened Jewish identity?

Can attending a Jewish day school weaken Jewish identity if the experience for a particular child is a negative one? If someone works at a second job in order to make it easier for his/her children to go to colleges of their choice and s/he therefore decides to pull back from Jewish volunteering, does that reflect a lessening of Jewish identity or commitment? Clearly, it is easy to misinterpret behavioral data.

Connected But Not Unified

If we cannot be altogether certain about how Jewish identity works, we should not be surprised at the imprecision surrounding our understanding of Jewish community. The American Jewish community is closer to a group with shared interests than it is to a functional community where the members know each other and share substantial loyalty. Even the Jewish community of most large cities — the Philadelphia Jewish community for example — is actually not a single Jewish community. It is a loose association of partly interconnected groups of Jews.

Included in the count of Jews in every such American city are many who are part of no organized Jewish group. Are they really part of the community? Many such Jews do not experience themselves as active members of the Jewish community even if they in some way identify as Jews. Some are not active members of any other community, either. So how should the Jewish community's boundaries be defined? If we have smaller interconnected Jewish communities in metropolitan areas, is it these that should be strengthened? Which Jews should we attempt to include?

Synagogues and Agencies

Many Jewish leaders posit that strengthening synagogue communities is one way to strengthen Jewish identity and community. In the United States, synagogues remain the single most powerful force for Jewish acculturation. Both in terms of social relationships and of religious and educational activity, the synagogue plays a central role. For many Jews, it is also the first place to turn for cultural activities and a sense of community.

Strengthening the quality and quantity of the religious, educational, cultural and social programming of synagogues may therefore be one way to strengthen Jewish communities. Inten-

sifying the involvement of those affiliated with congregations through better programming can be undertaken simultaneously with reaching out to encourage others not already engaged in synagogue life to come to these programs.

Jewish Community Centers, Jewish family-service agencies, policy-oriented agencies such as the American Jewish Committee, Israel-oriented organizations such as Peace Now and Hadassah, and others all have some role to play in creating the web of organizational structures that support the feeling and reality of Jewish community. Jewish country clubs provide an important peer group for many Jews. Jewish day schools can play a major role in creating a community not only of students and teachers, but of whole families as well.

Building Organizations, Building Identity?

Strengthening Jewish identity can also occur through efforts to meet the needs of the organizations themselves. Commitment very often is deepened as a result of giving time and money — commitment is not only what causes the financial gift or personal participation. Making the gift and investing the time are ways of increasing commitment, as well. We do not normally think of working to create volunteers as a form of strengthening Jewish identity and commitment, but indeed it is. So is good leadership-development programming.

How strong the resulting Jewish community becomes will remain difficult to measure. Indeed, how one defines community may well determine the measures used. Should we look at the level of activity? At financial soundness? At the level of average Jewish education? Do we count the number of people involved, or evaluate the intensity of the programming for those already at the core of the community? Each measure will yield a different result.

Perhaps all of these together may yield some valuable information; however, it is not clear that strengthening the level of Jewish activity, intensifying the level of education, and increasing the quality of Jewish life together will strengthen the American Jewish community sufficiently to increase its intensity and numbers in the coming decades. Establishing achievable goals will require careful consideration.

Identity as Choice

It may be a matter of semantics as to whether we describe our efforts to strengthen Jewish life as outreach, renaissance, identity intensification or something else. What is clear is that in a society as open as ours, identifying Jewishly is a choice; becoming active in Jewish living is a choice; public engagement in the Jewish community is a choice. Those choices will be shaped significantly by how attractive the Jewish options are compared to other possibilities.

The quality of what we do can be measured in aesthetic terms or by using other parameters. It is clear, however, that the people in America who

identify as Jews face a huge array of enticing choices about how to spend their time, energy and money. If their Jewish identities are to be in the forefront of their thoughts, and Jewish activities in the forefront of their schedules, Jewish organizations need effectively to market high-quality programming that attracts Jews to substantial Jewish engagement.

For those concerned with the future of the Jewish community, substantial investments in programming that are aimed at strengthening Jewish community and deepening Jewish identity are welcome developments. Of course, it is *tzedakah* money that is supporting those programs, and we have an obligation to spend it with care in order to honor the donor's intentions, as well as to serve the needs of the community. Therefore, in addition to using our best abilities to design programs for maximum efficiency and effectiveness, we must also evaluate and assess whether it is worthwhile to continue them, and if so, how they are to be modified or altered in order to maximize future benefits.

Measurable Outcomes

All program evaluation has its pitfalls, but it is considerably easier to measure how well someone's Hebrew improves, or how much someone knows about Pesaḥ, than it is to discern accurately the degree to which their Jewish identity has been strengthened or their commitment to the Jewish community has been deepened. What might some of our criteria for evaluating programs in this area be?

Evaluation is made much simpler when measurable outcomes are specified in advance. Some measures include the number of participants, the satisfaction they feel as recorded in survey instruments and reflected by regular attendance, how much they have learned, and their reports on changes in their relationships to each other, the sponsoring institution, and the community more generally. Changes in behavior can, of course, also be tracked by using suitable instruments before, during and after programs. This is particularly sensible when programs are intense and extended over a considerable length of time.

Most such evaluation, however, does not use control groups. The degree of success is consequently hard to gauge. Whether we are really getting maximum effectiveness and efficiency from most programs is a matter of speculation. Thus, for example, survey data indicates that Birthright Israel programs, particularly when accompanied by suitable learning before the trip and by good follow-up, are excellent at significantly increasing Jewish identity.

How to Read Responses?

But we do not know whether the results would be the same if we took a similar group of young adults and kept them together in an intensive atmosphere while we gave them tours of Jewish institutions in Eastern Europe or of Holocaust sites. Nor do we know whether the trip would be just as effective if we had a Jewish immersion ex-

perience of equal length at a retreat site in the United States where the participants were completely removed from their ordinary experience. We do not actually know what makes the Birthright Israel trips work the way they do. And so we do not know whether we have the best designed trips possible, and we do not know whether there are less expensive alternatives that would work equally well.

These kinds of issues make evaluation and decisions about program design and funding quite challenging. We know, for example, that early childhood is a key part of the life cycle in terms of Jewish identity formation. And we know that an immersion experience in excellent Jewish early-childhood programs is important, as are home experiences. But we don't actually know what is causative and what is only correlative here.

Focus of Investment

Are we better off investing in the Jewish acculturation of new parents? Or should we be investing in family education with young people? Or is that program investment better spent once the children are older? Of course, some of these questions can be answered by developmental psychology, but others require forms of control-group studies and evaluations that have not yet been done.

It might be argued that the cost of doing such an evaluation is so high that it is an inefficient investment. But without credible evaluation, we will never really be able to identify which activities are the most effective at accomplishing our goals. The case can be made that teaching spirituality and *mitzvot* — theology, ritual and ethical action — might be more effective than many of the cultural programs we see around us.

Intersecting Paths

There are many paths into Judaism, and the broad variety of Jewish activities all reinforce each other, so it is helpful if the paths cross as often as possible. While there is an enormous amount of anecdotal evidence that supports this approach, we lack the social-scientific evidence to demonstrate that one combination of activities is the most effective investment.

Furthermore, we do not necessarily understand the full impact of life-cycle events, political events and social connections, many of which are in any case beyond our control. As these change, the impact of programs, experiences and social events will change as well. Thus, program evaluation and longitudinal reviews of program effectiveness should be an ongoing part of program design.

Evidence in Hand

Do all of these issues indicate that we are unable to make any meaningful statements about efficient and effective programming and its impact on identity and community? I think not. We know that people become personally engaged by the charisma, passion and example of leaders. We know that once

we induce people to come to some programs, it is possible to move them to come to others.

We know that we obtain much better results when we design welcoming institutions and when there are events that people can come to without needing substantial previous backgrounds in order to enjoy and participate in them.

We know that creating both light and heat at the core of communities through increased learning, participation and practice is critical for communities that wish to spark others into substantial engagement in Jewish life. Our challenge is to take seriously the need for evaluation and to do it as well as we can, while not allowing ourselves to be deterred by those situations where full evaluation is impossible.

Set Realistic Goals

The American Jewish community needs to become much more sophisticated in its understanding of the complexities of personal identity in an open society if it is to set realistic goals and create appropriate methods for Jewish identity development, which is critical to the future of American Jewish life. No less, the reality that Jewish community rootedness in America exists through interactive, local subcommunities must shape our program investments if they are to be effective for community building.

But most important of all, we need to remember at each turn that stronger Jewish identity and stronger Jewish community are not answers in themselves. They are only meaningful if the result is more ethical and spiritual lives, the furtherance of justice, truth and peace, and ongoing engagement by more people in efforts to improve our world and draw closer to the divine.

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1. See, for example, Sherry Rosen, *Jewish Identity Development* (American Jewish Committee, 1995).
2. Mordecai Kaplan, *Judaism As A Civilization* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1934), 216.

The Synagogue: Family, Workplace, or Community?

By Adina Newberg

Synagogues in North America, and the rabbis who serve them, have rich, multifaceted relationships. Rabbis serve synagogues through their knowledge and leadership.They are ritual leaders and also the managers of complex organizations with staffs, buildings and budgets. The synagogue's primary purpose — serving the communal, educational, religious and social needs of its congregants — is necessarily intertwined with administrative and business concerns.

This complex grouping of needs in turn leads to equally complex relationships between the rabbi and his/her congregants.

Relationships and Systems

Adding to this complexity is the fact that rabbis are not only leaders of synagogues, they are also employees. They are accountable and responsible to lay leaders who are, in turn, recipients of the rabbis' guidance and leadership. Rabbis participate in more systems, however, than that of the workplace alone. Their personal system includes their own families and close friendships (with the expectations, demands and needs that such relationships involve) as well as their own personal needs, desires and expectations. All these create a rich and complex tapestry of intertwined functions and relationships.

Beyond any relationship with congregants, synagogues, family and self, rabbis have a spiritual life, a relationship with God achieved through prayer, study and meditation. This relationship requires time as well as attention. It is a crucial aspect of work for those who attend to matters of the spirit. It is the source of inspiration, strength and purpose for most rabbis. Yet in some ways it is an invisible element of the rabbi's work, one that may compete with synagogue matters, such as leading services, teaching, counseling congregants and managing the budget; or with personal matters, such as a child's soccer game or an evening with friends.

Complex Images

As in all social systems, synagogue members construct a composite of complex images that informs their experience within the organization. These images, which are often projected onto synagogues and reflected back, are based upon

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our experiences in the past and our expectations in the present.

For example, many of us remember the synagogue of our childhood, which we either liked or disliked; these memories often inform our adult wishes and expectations of what a synagogue (and, by extension, Jewish organizations in general) should be. As members of synagogues in contemporary North America, many of us hold onto a mental model of our ideal synagogue, based on the composite images that mirror our expectations. Some of these images are conscious, others are not, but all play a role in the way we act as part of the social system that is the synagogue.

Congregants' images and expectations of their rabbis evolve from an equally complex system. In *Living with Paradox: Religious Leadership and the Genius of Double Vision,* H. Newton Malony identifies an inherent paradox in the role of the clergy and the expectations congregants have of the person filling that role.[1] Paradox, he argues, is a central attribute of any type of leadership, especially in religious organizational life. Maloney maintains that religious organizations may be viewed through organizational and sociological lenses, but also need to be examined through the lenses of religious mission and purpose, thus revealing paradoxical dimensions in an already complex organization.

Organizational Theory and the Synagogue

This paper will address these various aspects of the synagogue system and the rabbi's work in relation to the synagogue through the lens of organizational theory — particularly social systems theory. Organizations are evolving social systems; when we examine them, it is important to understand patterns of relationships and behaviors that go beyond the specific details of any particular example.

I will attempt, therefore, to focus on the patterns, interactions and relationships that the various rabbinic roles present vis-à-vis the synagogue system. The discussion will analyze the strengths and challenges each role presents, especially in light of the complexities created by the multiplicity of roles in synagogue life. The paper concludes by offering an alternative, integrative image, calling for a different set of roles and relationships based on thinking in relation to communities.

Synagogue Structure

Contemporary North American synagogues are non-profit organizations that attempt to carry out many of the roles filled by many other Jewish institutions in previous centuries. Not only places for prayer and Jewish ritual, synagogues house Jewish learning for adults and children alike, since most members do not study Judaic subjects independently in their homes. Synagogues strive to be the model Jewish entity, promoting the ideal Jewish life. As the head of the synagogue, the rabbi is expected (explicitly or implicitly) to be the role model for Jewish life and values, and to ensure the continuity of its members' Jewish lives from one generation to the next.

Jack Bloom calls this expected role

being a "symbolic exemplar."[2] Synagogues are the extended families in which Jewish celebration occurs and in which community ties are forged. Congregations also have fiscal and legal obligations, staffs, contracts, deadlines, bills to pay and goals to achieve. In order to accomplish these tasks, synagogues are structured formally and informally, like corporations.

At the same time, they function as volunteer organizations; they rely on presidents and executive boards to set policies and make key decisions, and on committees staffed by unpaid synagogue members who work alongside the paid staff to accomplish the objectives of the organization as a whole.

Synagogue as Community

A synagogue community, especially a Reconstructionist community, assumes a sense of caring and commitment to shared values and ideals, as well as to study, prayer and *tikkun olam* (repair of the world). While not all members can or should be equally committed to a particular course of action or idea, the pressure to fulfill the expectation of selfless commitment to the community is strong.

The resulting tension between the communal and the personal, between the perceived needs of the whole and the personal need for autonomy and independence, constantly pulls congregants in a variety of directions. The rabbi as the leader of the community and as an individual may be equally strained. The tension for him/her may be more accentuated, given the centrality of the professional role and the "symbolic exemplar" dimension it inherently carries.

Synagogue as Family

There are many ways in which synagogues can be viewed as families. When we mention the word "family," the connotations and associations are of caring, loving, unconditional love, with intergenerational participation and relationship. Many organizations attempt to emulate the image of family as their own because of these associations and connotations.

Likewise, individuals seek many of these attributes when they join synagogues. They are seeking unconditional love and caring by other congregants as well as by the staff, especially by the rabbi. Complementing this strong desire for belonging and caring, the structure of synagogues helps promote the notion of family.

As in the traditional image of families, synagogues are headed by an authority figure who is more knowledgeable and more experienced and who guides and teaches. As in families, synagogues are composed of multiple generations that are engaged in narratives that unite. There are past generations that have left a legacy, there are various age groups within it, and there is a hope and a desire that the "family" will continue into the future.

Both families and synagogues are the conduit of family stories and traditions from one generation to the other.[3] Both are the vehicles for inculcating and transferring values and ideals from past generations to future generations. As we

will see later, the image of family carries with it expectations and projections that greatly influence the rabbinic role in relation to the congregation.

Rabbinic Roles

David Teutsch describes distinct rabbinic roles and the conflict that can ensue when they are present all at once in the rabbi-congregant system: Pastor-Priest, Administrator-Facilitator, Scholar-Adjudicator, Magid-Teacher-Prophet and, finally, Beneficiary-Supervisee.[4] Jewish tradition, coupled with the evolving culture of the 21st century, evokes additional, alternative roles: Guide, Healer, Parent, Partner/Spouse or CEO. Synagogue members and their leaders must co-exist within this system where rabbis are in multiple roles. The leader upon whom these expected roles or images are projected must find a way to address them at the same time that he/she carries his/her own images and expectations, all while trying to address his/her own personal, spiritual and familial needs.[5]

All these roles are based on job descriptions and expectations that have evolved over the years in relation to rabbinic work in congregational life. However, none of these are free of psychological projections. The following description of roles presents a stronger dynamic of unconscious projections that accompany the more "rational" functions and expected accomplishments.

Rabbi as Administrator

If we think of the synagogue as a business, the rabbi often plays the role of a CEO with administrative responsibilities. S/he supervises staff, makes decisions and initiates planning for the overall system. The rabbi is often responsible for fundraising and for representing the synagogue to outside institutions (whether Jewish or not). The synagogue's success or failure as an organization that accomplishes its multiple missions is frequently attributed to the rabbi's ability to carry out her/his vision for the synagogue as a whole.[6]

But at the same time that the rabbi is a decision-maker, s/he is also an employee who is supervised by a board of directors and by its representative, the synagogue president. In some cases, this image mirrors the corporate relationship of stockholder/customer to CEO.[7]

If a congregation thinks of its rabbi in metaphoric terms of the "market" or "fair return on investments," it places the rabbi in the paradoxical role described by Malony: s/he is both an authority figure and an employee who takes orders and is supervised by the president and board. According to the business model, the rabbi's main function is to make the congregants happy — just as employees must respond to the stockholders' mandates.

"Fair Return?"

In order to succeed, the rabbi's secondary task is to create and market an attractive product. As "stockholders," congregants are "entitled to a fair return on their investment." What does "fair return" mean in this context? Feeling like part of a "family" in which the

rabbi is the parent? Obtaining a "satisfactory" education for their children? Hearing a good sermon on a particular holiday? Being "inspired" by the rabbi's prophetic vision?

Alternatively, does "fair return" mean being part of a well-run organization where the teachers, cantor, principal and other players are supervised carefully within as conservative a budget as possible? What happens when the rabbi, who is supposed to deliver the fair return for the congregants' investments, has a different vision of what that fair return should be?

Employee or Leader?

These questions are compounded when the business paradigm calls for performance evaluations and contracts, when budgets become a primary consideration and when "marketing plans" become an essential aspect of the rabbi's work. The rabbi who feels the call to serve the Jewish people finds him/herself essentially serving a particular "corporation" with all the associated business structures intended to ascertain the success of the congregational investment. The rabbi is challenged to distinguish between the need and desire to serve a synagogue community on the one hand, and the needs of the corporation, with its own history, culture and vision of success on the other

G. Lloyd Rediger, in *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack,*[8] asserts that the distinction between "business" and "service" is unnecessary and ultimately harmful. Congregations must accept that the financial bottom line is crucial for their well-being, and that there is nothing shameful in viewing the congregation as a business interested in making money for the sake of achieving its objectives with clarity and without resentment. If we were to follow Rediger's advice, rabbis would not feel conflict between service to the community and service to the "corporation" of the synagogue. Serving the business needs of the congregation would be understood as integral to serving its religious and spiritual needs.

Having Authority

To the degree that the rabbi is most often more Jewishly knowledgeable than others in the synagogue system, and the one paid to lead it, s/he is an authority in the synagogue and therefore has the power to make decisions in many areas of the synagogue's life. While Reconstructionist rabbis and the synagogues they serve espouse democratic decision-making, we cannot ignore the fact that rabbis have authority and bear responsibility for religious matters as well as other related areas.

How rabbis and congregations negotiate authority and power is an important element in the organization of all synagogues. The rabbi is thus, borrowing Teutsch's terms, a scholar-adjudicator, an administrator, a Magid-Scholar,[9] a CEO and a guide — all at once. The paradox of a community committed to democratic processes and one that pays an employee to perform leadership functions with hierarchical responsibilities is a paradox that needs

to be acknowledged, even if doing so does not provide an easy solution for the situation.

Rabbi as Parent

As mentioned above, there are many facets of a rabbi's work in which the rabbi can be seen as an authority. This authoritative role may be interpreted by many as "parental," not only because a parent is the most basic image of authority, but because many congregants unconsciously project their image of a family onto the synagogue. Thus, the image of a rabbi as a parental figure can be fraught with confusion: Are we talking about the rabbi's construction of parental authority, or the members' construction of that image?

As a spiritual guide, the rabbi provides advice and solace, as would a parent. S/he may also teach the children in preparation for bar or bat mitzvah. At the same time, s/he may have to decide on a particular expenditure, or may give a *d'var torah* about the importance of participating in an upcoming political rally. It is easy to imagine a scenario in which, after teaching a boy for his bar mitzvah, the rabbi meets with his mother in the social action committee and argues with her over plans for a rally. The debate and/or decision made at the meeting may create tension for the mother, who might also seek the rabbi's advice about the bar mitzvah, or need the rabbi's comfort for her own illness, while simultaneously dealing with her sense of "betrayal" and disappointment by the "parental" figure over the difference of opinions at the meeting. This scenario illustrates the complexity of the rabbi's simultaneous image as parent, spiritual guide and administrator.

"Parents" and "Children"

Congregations are complex systems with subsystems organized according to categories that are often determined by interest or age. Usually, each group wants the rabbi's blessing for its own particular stance or need. Like siblings, they fight for the parent's approval. Members who feel a lack of recognition for their ideas, work or other contributions may find themselves in conflict with the rabbi, or with those whom they interpret as being the rabbi's allies.

Like parents in nuclear families, rabbis represent a connection to the past and bear responsibility for preserving its traditional values for the succeeding generations. Parents, however, expect children eventually to start a new home, hopefully carrying the lessons they learned from the parents into their new family.

In a synagogue, there is a very delicate balance between tradition and innovation. When the "parent" is the rabbi, the dynamic is somewhat different. In synagogues, the rabbi/parent figure sometimes introduces innovations, and the congregants/children are the ones who resist. For example, a rabbi's call for openness to gay and lesbian members, or the use of feminine language in the prayers, or of spiritual terms different from those familiar to the congregants, often provokes resis-

tance and even dissension. The rabbi's innovation may be seen in these cases as breaking away from tradition and thus as a betrayal of it, and of the congregation, as well.

Rabbi as Child

In terms of the structure and function of synagogues, the president and the board are the ultimate decision-makers. Rabbis are employees of the board, which hires the rabbi, drafts the contract and decides upon the job description. If there is supervision at all, it comes from board members, which means that under certain circumstances they can tell a rabbi what to do, and even take action against her/him if s/he acts in ways that are unacceptable to them.

Whether the rabbi and her/his superiors have an ideological argument about Shabbat activities in the building, or whether the rabbi acts in a manner that the "superiors" deem inappropriate for a rabbi, the result is the same: The board and the president can step into a parental, authoritative role and treat the rabbi as a subordinate child.

Paradox of the Subordinate Child

As representative of the board, the president may act as parent not only in extreme cases, but also when the rabbi is young (and the president is generally older) or when the rabbi is new to the community. The president and the members of the executive committee may act as coaches to the rabbi, taking on the guiding aspect of parenting. Even in synagogues that encourage a democratic relationship between rabbi and lay leaders, the board — and the president as its ultimate representative — are in a hierarchically different position from the rabbi. The power that this position necessarily confers on the lay leaders accords them the role of parental figures in the synagogue "family."

The inherent structure of the synagogue — as employer of a rabbi who is an authority in Jewish matters with a mandate to lead the congregation — creates the inescapable paradox in which the rabbi is the subordinate child in certain matters and the parental authority or CEO in others. How this is handled in the day-to-day life of the synagogue depends on the degree to which the synagogue is willing to recognize this paradox and to confront it through its espoused values.

Rabbi as Spouse/Partner

At a recent installation of a rabbi in his new synagogue, the theme of the evening was "the wonderful *shiddukh*" (marriage-match). All the speeches repeated in different ways how fortunate the congregation felt, and expressed the hope that the synagogue would be the rabbi's "home" for many years to come. At the conclusion of the formal part of the evening, when refreshments were served, a cake was brought out featuring a *hupah* as its centerpiece.

Congregants use words such as "love," "loyalty" and "partnership" to describe the espoused commitment among members to one another and to

the synagogue as a whole; there is a sense of shared fate and of partnership, as in marriages, which are entered into with a hope of a permanent relationship.[10] That love, loyalty and commitment are extended to the rabbi, and expected from the rabbi toward the congregation, regardless of salary and other work conditions.

In this paradigm, it is often easy to lose sight of the fact that the rabbi is an employee of the synagogue, and that the rabbi's commitment cannot be as unconditional as a familial commitment. The synagogue as an employer has the obligation to bring up contractual matters when necessary, expectations of (familial) love and commitment notwithstanding.

Moreover, if the rabbi as employee raises contractual or financial issues s/he can be seen as betraying the (familial) love extended by the congregants. By asking for a raise in salary s/he may be seen as sullying that love and commitment. And if the rabbi should decide to leave this job for another, especially for another congregational job, s/he may be considered to be "divorcing" the synagogue.

Rabbi as Colleague/Sibling

Rabbis are regarded as peers by many congregants. Their ages, educational and professional achievements and life style make this at times a natural relationship. It is possible for example, for the rabbi and congregants to have children in the same school or even the same class, to have shared friends and to belong to the same groups or community.

As we have seen with the other relationships, this too is a complex one. On one level, circumstances place the rabbi and congregant on the same level in relation to the group, community or friend; they are thus siblings or peers within that framework. On the other hand, when one aspect of the rabbi's work intervenes, the relationship necessarily becomes less linear. The rabbi may be that "peer's" counselor in a difficult marital relationship. The peer may need to negotiate the rabbi's contract. Sometimes these two scenarios may be happening simultaneously, with the possible complication that the rabbi's child and the peer's child are together in the car-pool and have become close friends.

Rabbi as Individual

As we have seen, the roles of CEO/administrator, parent/child and spouse/partner all represent dimensions of the relationship between the rabbi and the synagogue system, and between the rabbi and individuals within that system. There is a third crucial relationship in that system that must be addressed: the rabbi as s/he relates to her/himself — the rabbi's own emotions, spiritual life and body.

These multiple relationships occur simultaneously, each demanding and at times pulling in different directions. The rabbi might feel the need for a quiet, meditative Shabbat *tefilah*, yet the congregation might be celebrating an important community occasion, during which the rabbi must try to put

her/his own feelings and needs aside. These relationships are intertwined: The rabbi's emotional and spiritual life does not take place in a vacuum. On the contrary, it is influenced by what happens within and alongside the congregation. At times, the rabbi will be uplifted by the celebratory feelings in the synagogue, despite his/her initial reticence. At others, if the synagogue as a system is going through a time of tension due to the members' personal problems, the rabbi may carry some of those tensions into her/his own personal life.

Spiritual Journey

While it is important for rabbis to be genuine about their own emotions and spiritual paths, they must not forget that their personal life cannot be at the center of the congregation's life. Similarly, while the rabbi's spiritual journey and search can inspire and guide the congregation, ultimately the members, individually and communally, must find their own paths. While individuals in the synagogue will always relate to the rabbi as an individual, albeit a "symbolic" individual, the rabbi must always balance the individual and institutional needs and aspects of her/his interaction with those of the congregants.

A strong spiritual life and practice not only provides a source of strength for the rabbi and for the entire congregation, but also affords the rabbi the integrity and ability to keep her/his personal needs separate from those of the congregation. In this manner, the rabbi may rely on her/his own spiritual reservoirs and not on the congregation for emotional and spiritual fulfillment. This approach will also help the rabbi to avoid inappropriate emotional entanglement with congregational issues and conflicts.

Rabbi as Priest-Pastor-Healer

The ancient priest, (the Kohen in our tradition) is today's pastor/healer.[11] In more contemporary terms, the rabbi is counselor and healer for synagogue members suffering from illness, bereavement or confusion. The rabbi is responsible for helping to rekindle faith among congregants, and for providing a spiritual direction for those who perhaps never had one, or who have become distanced from their spirituality. The rabbi is expected to bring comfort to all members of the congregation, regardless of their level of involvement or status in the synagogue, and regardless of any spiritual confusion or doubts s/he may experience.

The rabbi must console and comfort the president during the period of mourning, whether the two of them have argued previously over policy, or whether, for example, the president criticized the rabbi at last week's education committee meeting. The pastor/healer aspect is constantly present in the daily work of a rabbi and, as such, it permeates all the other roles s/he performs in the organizational structure. Ironically, appraising the rabbi's performance reflects the business model of the synagogue organization; yet the content of the evaluation inevitably relates to the role of healer/pastor/priest, blurring

the two organizational constructs.

Rabbi as Prophet-Teacher-Magid

In addition to the role of priest-pastor-healer, the rabbi is often expected be a prophet. The biblical prophet who pursued justice at the risk of fighting kings provides inspiration for the modern-day understanding of prophetic work, reminding the congregation of the values that inspire social justice. One of the rabbi's tasks, especially in Reconstructionist synagogues, is to inspire the congregation to take action in the direction of social justice, as interpreted by particular circumstances and contexts. The particulars can be many — supporting the peace movement in the Middle East, fighting poverty and so on. While the lay leaders in a synagogue may be able social activists who can take leadership roles in the synagogue, the rabbi's strong involvement, teaching and connection to Jewish values are crucial for the success of such work.

The role of prophet involves teaching roles; by guiding and leading her/his congregants, the rabbi can encourage their personal actions. To the degree that the prophetic role evokes a sense of authority and teaching, it might echo a sense of parental function. Yet it is in the realm of communal or institutional action where the rabbi has the most influence. This role can be an awkward one for the rabbi, especially in light of other roles played in the synagogue system, particularly those of healer and subordinate supervisee.

How can a rabbi consistently push congregants to become involved with poor inner-city residents when the congregation's president complains of a shortage of volunteers in the synagogue? As important as social action may be, it might not be deemed appropriate if it threatens to deplete the organization's volunteer force. The rabbi will eventually be evaluated not only by how well the prophetic role was carried out, but also by other issues: how well s/he performed her/his administrative role, and did or did not recruit members for the synagogue's everyday functioning.

Rabbi as Role Model

As a teacher and prophet, the rabbi is a role model. Though s/he may have little ultimate influence on the personal decisions of members, congregants tend to magnify and scrutinize the rabbi's life choices and actions. The rabbi is often viewed as the conscience of the synagogue, and as such is expected to lead an exemplary life that the congregants may or may not choose to emulate. Phil Zuckerman's *Strife in the Sanctuary*[12] describes the challenges of this paradigm as they were played out in an Oregon synagogue where members were satisfied with the image of their rabbi as a political and Jewish conscience and felt little need to take action themselves.

As a teacher, the rabbi fulfills the American-Jewish expectation that the synagogue serve as the transmitter of Jewish traditions and values. Here, the role of teacher is modeled on the image of a parent invested in transmitting the traditions and values of past gen-

erations to the present one. Once more, as in other aspects of the prophetic role, the rabbi is the "model Jew," the community's conscience, the one who is, in loco parentis, ultimately concerned with the "children's" Jewish knowledge.

Rabbi as Community Member

The rabbi and staff are hired professionals, knowledgeable not only in Jewish matters but also in communal and educational work. While there is an inherent difference between the status of lay leaders, who choose to be part of a community, and the professional staff that is paid to lead that community, there is a sense of shared purpose guiding all the members of the synagogue system.

Two prominent social-systems thinkers, Fred Emery and Eric Trist, believe that social systems are purposeful and ideal-seeking.[13] These systems are guided by ideals and values, even if they do not always utilize the most appropriate strategies and goals to reach those ideals, and even if other human and social forces intervene and move them off course.

Accordingly, human beings strive to pursue ideals even if they are not always aware of how this pursuit takes place within their social systems. If social systems in general are purposeful and ideal-seeking, synagogues are especially so. The ideals of a spiritual community will guide the synagogue and provide direction for that community as a social system. Among these ideals one may find democracy, *tikkun olam* and study for people of all ages, as well as community building and the strengthening of Jewish identity.

Needs, Mission and Values

The image of community as a guiding principle for a synagogue is one that emphasizes the needs, mission and values of the community as compasses for its members' actions. A religious Jewish community strives for and struggles to find a balance between personal autonomy and communal values and ideals. It takes seriously the idea of *mitzvot* as a communal imperative.

The ideal of a synagogue modeled after the image of community is attractive because it strives toward intimacy and fellowship. The strong communal need for fellowship, shared vision and action in religious and communal settings is powerfully described by scholars who have examined the issue of communities, and especially religious communities and their effect on society.[14]

The rabbi is a member of the community in the sense that he/she participates in building a communal sense of sharing, caring and mutual responsibility and responsiveness. The rabbi, like other community members, will participate in life-cycle and other community-building events, but, as mentioned earlier, there is a conceptual difference in the quality of involvement when the rabbi's participation is predicated upon his/her being a paid community member. The board can tell the rabbi that his/her participation in the life of the community is no longer desired, or that his/her vision for the community and

its life needs to change. On the other hand, the rabbi may engage in community-building activities such as discussions about particular individuals, groups or issues of import to the community as a whole. The rabbi is necessarily both a part of the community and apart from it.

Rabbi as Community Leader

The intertwining of the roles of "super community member" and community leader carries with it high expectations. Synagogues do not expect their members to participate in every social event or to sit on every committee, but the leader's participation is expected to be total, and members often interpret the rabbi's participation or lack of participation as personal recognition or rejection.

In a synagogue that strives to be a community based on democratic participation, the rabbi and the congregation members are faced with the task of continually refining these guiding and defining values. The rabbi and other staff members have a different set of responsibilities and expectations, even if they strive to achieve the same goals and dreams as the rest of the volunteer members of the community. Even if a synagogue is based on shared values, and even if those values include a celebration of diversity and mutual respect among the different players, it is still not free of conflict and differences, nor should it be. As William Blake remarks, "without contraries there is no progression."[15]

Differences need to be acknowledged, respected and fully debated. In this manner, the community will be more ready to accept potentially divisive issues. When decisions are made on the basis of study and communal discussion, a sense of sharing and openness develops as a result. This outcome may soften the disappointment for those who were opposed to the decision. The rabbi as the leader not only facilitates the discussion and guides it, but more importantly teaches and steers the process of learning relevant material.

Balancing Individual and Group Needs

Some of the interactions that take place in the synagogue are individual, especially when it comes to counseling and pastoral work. Yet many synagogue functions take place in groups, such as prayer, educational classes and committee work. Some of the rabbi's functions are geared toward the entire synagogue program: planning, prioritizing, teaching classes, leading *tefilot* and so forth. The rabbi as the synagogue leader constantly struggles to find a balance between honoring each individual and considering the needs of the entire synagogue. Sometimes, the needs of a particular individual are addressed over the whole. In other situations, the desires of one group are stressed and preferred over the desires of another group. There is no way to avoid this situation, nor should there be.

However, it is important to remember that these actions, even when necessary, can undermine the feelings of

cohesiveness and mutuality intended in the image of community. Here, too, we see that the rabbi is continuously cognizant of the tensions between the individual and the whole, between a personal vision of community and the larger vision; between the role of teacher and prophet and the one of parent, CEO or administrator.

Familial Images

Synagogues, like all organizations, define their structures and processes by drawing on the images most familiar to their members. In this analysis, we have seen how images of families and family relations find an echo in synagogue life. Business and workplace cultures are also reflected in the relationships, structures and processes of synagogues. Examining synagogues as systems has shown us that synagogues are not merely families; neither are they merely workplaces.

Not only are there additional images of social constructs that are reflected in synagogues, but the images of family and workplaces each carry, as we have seen, challenging and difficult connotations in the context of a synagogue. This is true from an organizational perspective as well as from the perspective of the interactions and relationships between individuals, particularly the rabbis and their congregants.

The rabbi/synagogue relationship can be viewed systemically as a series of concentric, interlocking circles: the rabbi's own spiritual and personal life; family; his/her work as a teacher and spiritual guide; his/her work as CEO/administrator, employee and community leader. The synagogue as a workplace that employs the rabbi and other staff provides a sense of "family" intimacy for its members and requires familial loyalty and commitment from its employees, especially its rabbi.

Matching Metaphors

"Family" or "workplace" are metaphors that help us frame our thoughts about synagogues as complex and multifaceted organizations. The exploration of a new metaphor that elicits new kinds of relationships, processes and structures offers the opportunity for fresh thinking and creative solutions to some of the challenges presented by the other paradigms.

Synagogue as "community" elicits the kind of relationships and processes that are closer to the Reconstructionist thinking. The synagogue as community could offer a fresh, less problematic model of synagogue/rabbi/congregant relationships. Synagogues as communities can provide opportunities for caring and commitment, but do not necessarily contain in them the strong expectations of unconditional and unending commitment that is implied in the image of a family.

Opportunity and Challenge

Communities are more like workplaces than like families because they are voluntary. There is no compulsion or obligation to join them and participate in their lives. They are more like families than workplaces, however, be-

cause they do address the needs of their members for belonging, purpose and commitment.

Unlike families and workplaces, the inner structure of synagogues does not have defined hierarchies and authority lines. Therein rests the opportunity as well as the challenge: Its images and expectations are more open to the initiative, imagination and joint decision-making of the system as a whole.

This openness is also a challenge. It requires responsible and careful planning and decision-making processes, and respectful relationships in order to succeed. These are new attitudes and behaviors. They are not always intuitive or natural, but the rewards they offer for the individuals, the professionals and the Jewish community in general make the engagement and investments in them a worthwhile endeavor.

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1. H. Newton Maloney, *Living with Paradox: Religious Leadership and the Genius of Double Vision* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1998). Maloney describes eight paradoxes along the delineation of four categories: role, perspective, structure and mission.
2. Jack Bloom, "The Special Tensions of Being a Rabbi," in *Sh'ma* (20/386), January 9, 1990.
3. Edwin Friedman, *From Generation to Generation. Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985).
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5. These roles and images of religious leaders pertain to non-Orthodox synagogues in which the roles and functions of the rabbis have been changing and moving away from the tradition role of "scholar-adjudicator."
6. Teutsch, *op. cit.*
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Peering Into the Future: Considerations for Reconstructing the Synagogue

By Hayim Herring

While I appreciate the invitation to think about the future of the synagogue, I am mindful of all of the prognostications that so radically missed the mark. Item:[1]

- "The phonograph . . . is not of any commercial value." (Thomas Edison, remarking on his own invention to this assistant, Sam Insull, 1880)
- "Sensible and responsible women do not want to vote." (Grover Cleveland, 1905)
- "[Babe] Ruth made a big mistake when he gave up pitching." (Tris Speaker, 1921)
- "Who the hell wants to hear actors talk?" (Harry Warner, Warner Brothers Pictures, 1927)
- "There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in their home." (Ken Olsen, president of Digital Equipment Corporation, 1977)

Moreover, I am also cognizant of the rabbinic statement about prophecy post *ḥurban ha-bayit* (destruction of the Temple) belonging either to children or fools. Not wishing to be in either category, I find it daunting to peer too far out, especially in our age. For especially today, who can say with certainty what the future will bring?

With these reservations, I will describe what some trends suggest about the future of the synagogue. Some of these trends are disturbing, but the data are there, and I believe that we become a more dynamic community by struggling with them.

In particular, I want to pay close attention to two younger cohorts of Jews, Gen X'ers and Millenials, the two generations that chronologically follow the Boomer generation. If synagogues do not learn how to adapt to them, we are likely to see a steep decline in synagogue membership and participation in the years ahead. We have reason to be concerned that the base of support for synagogues will erode because of their lack of involvement, and the quality of syna-

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gogue life that we count on today may not be here much longer in the future.

Conceptual Framework

In considering what shapes synagogues will take, it may be helpful to create some rubrics into which we can pour our imagination. The four that I will use are people, purpose, process/organizational models and professionals.

First, we want to understand the demographic profile of upcoming generations that will hopefully inhabit the synagogue (the people). Then, we need to look at the repertoire of values embodied by the synagogue (the purpose) and consider how to align those values with the needs and desires of these upcoming generations. We can then ask questions about the organizational structure of the synagogue and imagine the kind of processes and models that will support the mission of the synagogue and allow it to express and fulfill the needs of new generations. Finally, we can consider the kind of rabbi that is needed to function in a new internal and external environment.

This essay takes the perspective of the potential user of the synagogue into account. Applying an end-user orientation reminds us that the synagogue has been and continues to be an evolving institution that has responded to varied historical conditions. This perspective suggests that all aspects of the synagogue must be open to a rethinking of essential purposes and functions.

Generational Layers

With advances in medicine, we have the unprecedented phenomenon of having significant numbers of four generations of people alive. These four generations are described as the "Veteran/ Silent Generation," "Baby Boomers," "Gen X'ers" and "Millenials." While researchers demarcate these generations somewhat differently, Veterans are defined as those born from 1922-1943, Baby Boomers from 1943-1960, Generation X from 1960-1980 and Millenials from 1980-2000.

Each generation is influenced by different historical forces. As a result, "It is further assumed that the cultural definitions of reality forged by a generation in its formative years are carried, to a greater or lesser degree, throughout the lives of its members."[2] There is a range of tremendously significant implications in this assumption. For our purposes, the primary importance of understanding the impact of generational experience is that it helps us appreciate that each generation brings different values, attitudes and expectations to all facets of life and the institutions they inhabit, including work, education, family, relationships and civic and religious involvement.

Paradigms Change

As this essay is focused on reconstructing the synagogue, I would like to spend some time on the upcoming millennial generation. I feel compelled to do so because the American Jewish community tends to react slowly to fundamental changes that happen over a long period of time. (That may be true of other faith communities, but I can

only speak for the one that I know and love.) We are second to none when it comes to mobilizing for a crisis, but, in ordinary times, we are very comfortable operating on autopilot.

Currently, there are a number of local and national synagogue "transformation" efforts underway. This is positive and we need more of them. However, it is typically Baby Boomers who are leading these change efforts and, as Boomers are accustomed to do, they appear to be able to concentrate on their needs but may be neglectful of the needs of generations that will follow them. The ancient sage Hillel's ethic of Jewish leadership — "If I am only for myself, what am I?"— also requires us to be oriented toward others. We Boomers must also reach out to Gen X'ers and Millenials, extend a hand to them, and bring them into our communities.

Thinking Like a Millenial Jew

Based on research from outside of the Jewish community,[3] let us try to imagine what it would be like to experience growing up in the world as a Millenial. A key change that makes our experience of growing up different from that of prior generations is a feeling of vulnerability close to home—on many levels. Unlike our Boomer parents, who had to worry about "the enemy" in faraway lands, "the enemy" has struck locally. We will remember violent episodes like the Columbine shooting, the Oklahoma City terrorist attack, the collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, anthrax scares in the mail, Catholic priests abusing children, metal detectors in schools and increased security in public places.

If we were Millenials, we would also be influenced by other major trends in technology, the media and entertainment. Having witnessed the trial of O.J. Simpson and the impeachment hearings of President Clinton, we might be naturally suspicious of celebrities and political leaders. We would also have been raised on a digital demand-feeding schedule. Think about how many screens our generation is exposed to: the hundred-channel cable television screen, the personal desktop assistant screen, the Cineplex movie screen, the cell phone screen and the computer screen. We would begin to witness the convergence of these technologies so that we could send and receive images on our cell phones and access e-mail from the television. We have redefined multitasking, and can easily manage watching television, talking on-line and doing homework.

No Brand Loyalty

We are tired of being marketed to all of the time. We do not like the brands that appeal to our parents in clothing, beverages, movies or music. We are not loyal to any brand, but if someone wants our attention, they will need to market to us with a humorous, ironic edge.

MTV is our favorite music station. We need rapid edits, booming sounds and graphic images that, unlike our parents, do not make us nauseous or give us a headache. We would create CD's with the music that we want to

hear. For entertainment, we would also not only watch the movies that we like but make the movies that we want. We would probably have our own website and might decide to publish our thoughts on-line. We would also pay a subscription to an on-line gaming service and assume a virtual identity that might be totally different from the way we live our lives in real time. According to some estimates, we may spend as much as up to a third of our lives on-line.

At Home With Pluralism

Diversity and multiculturalism would not be adult phrases over which there was debate but an ordinary, unnoticed part of our daily reality. Like Tiger Woods, who is both a real person and a symbol of multiculturalism, we would also dismiss the significance of the exclusion of women from the Augusta National, believing that women — and indeed, all people — have achieved full access to all careers. We would also not harbor prejudices toward what older people refer to as "alternative family structures" and, to the contrary, might be offended by references to "intact" or "normative" families. We understand that our culture is not the only one in the world and are at home with people our own age from many different countries.

Because of the Internet and other technologies, we would know how to retrieve and manipulate the information that we need to determine our goals. We would recognize that we have to be socially involved to solve the problems around us, and would want to make money doing something that is also socially meaningful. Despite the current problems, we think that we will make the world better because we see a future with unlimited creative possibilities.

New Modes of Jewish Expression

The several studies on Jewish Millenials and their predecessors Jewish Gen X'ers,[4] paint a picture that is consistent with the research from the general community. The way Millenials express their Judaism is different from (and some might say inferior to) prior generations. Yet, Millenials do express pride in being Jewish.

Jewish Millenials are generally unsatisfied with the Jewish education they received and therefore find serious study of Judaism appealing, while spirituality, an interest of Boomers, is not a category that resonates with them. Those from unaffiliated and interfaith families are especially interested in the cultural and artistic expression of Judaism.

Typically, young women are more active in organized Jewish activities than their male counterparts. These same studies indicate that Jews of this generation value academic achievement and attach a high priority to financial well-being. It is therefore not surprising to find that they spend a considerable amount of time working for pay already as teenagers, often at jobs that they do not find meaningful.

Millenials are interested in learning about Israel and the Holocaust and indicate interest in raising their children

as Jews. While celebrating holidays with their families is enjoyable to them, formal affiliation with Jewish institutions is unimportant, as is the practice of ritual behavior and attendance at synagogue services.

Millenials are universalists in their worldview, value cultural diversity and are unconcerned about dating non-Jews. They do not like labeling other groups and, in a related vein, dislike barriers that separate people from one another, both within and outside of the Jewish community. Interest in volunteerism and making the world a better place is of great importance to them.

Implications for Synagogue Life

What implications for future synagogue life can we tease out of findings from within and outside of the Jewish community? They suggest that:

- Although their Jewish behaviors may be different from ours, upcoming generations are proud of being Jewish;
- These generations have fewer memories of Jewish family celebrations and fewer experiences of being in the synagogue with their families;
- They are less interested in Jewish rituals;
- They are accustomed to self-directing their life choices;
- They celebrate religious, cultural and ethnic diversity and have weaker feelings of Jewish ethnic solidarity;
- They value subjective experiences as a way of knowing the world over traditional propositional truths;
- While they value education, they also value entertainment, especially if it has an edge to it;
- They need to be reached through multiple media channels;
- They need to have their loyalty earned and maintained on a regular basis;
- They value a community that provides them physical and emotional safety;
- They expect to see a diversity of people within their midst;
- They want to be respected as individuals capable of contributing to their community.

Today, synagogues are structured as venues for community-building through expressing scripted ritual behavior and sharing the objective wisdom of the Jewish tradition, with rabbis often serving as the authorities in both areas. In other words, synagogues are currently organized to be in conflict with the values of upcoming generations. Synagogues now have the challenge of adapting to Jewish Millenials, or they will risk alienating them. That means that all aspects of synagogue life need to be informed by the research that is emerging on future generations while still tending to the needs of older generations.

Midrashim on Modernity

Three of the religious movements (Reform, Orthodox and Conservative) can be viewed broadly as a *midrash* on modernity as understood in a European context. Reconstructionist Judaism can be viewed as a *midrash* on late modernity in America. And it appears that we are seeing the emergence of a post-modern *midrash* in what is broadly described as the Jewish Renewal movement.

By "*midrash*," I mean these movements captured the *zeitgeist* of their times. They responded to the burning issues of their day and developed broad strategies and approaches to deal with them, by highlighting those aspects of the Jewish tradition that resonated with the times and minimizing others that struck a dissonant note.

Scholars of modern Jewish history have described how Reform, Orthodox and Conservative Judaism were responses to the challenges of emancipation and enlightenment. Reconstructionist Judaism can similarly be viewed as a methodology for answering questions about the unprecedented challenge to American Jews of living simultaneously in two civilizations and understanding Judaism from the rational and pragmatic perspective of the interwar period.

Post-Modern Jewish Renewal

Jewish Renewal is responding to a different set of questions, opportunities and challenges. It values *tikkun olam* (repair of the world), combined with *tikkun halev* (personal spiritual development), reflecting its dual emphasis on healing the external world through the pursuit of social, political and environmental justice, while developing individual spirituality. The blending of mystical and hasidic traditions, along with openness toward other religions and spiritual practices, are meant to foster a subjective experience of the Divine. In sum, it has the feel of a thoroughly postmodern movement.

As one of the most recent entrants on the American Jewish scene, does Renewal have an advantage of being more in tune with the *zeitgeist* of our times? Will it play the functional equivalent that Reconstructionism played in an earlier time, having an influence far greater than its numbers would suggest? From an organizational perspective, will it ultimately take the shape of a modern denomination? Or will it evolve into a different kind of organization, one that has minimal structure but is able to move more nimbly on the grassroots level by influencing individuals and congregations of all denominations with its ideas, religious messages and innovative practices?

Two Options

What is clear is that each movement appears to be fundamentally assessing its direction — evaluating, creating or recreating its *midrash* on Judaism. Each movement appears to understand that the issues and questions that gave birth to them have changed. This kind of self-assessment is positive, for it is what healthy organizations do. What will be most interesting to observe over the next decade is the option that the respective movements will choose. There appear to be two basic choices, each one posing a different set of challenges and opportunities.

Option one is to bring the theology and practice of each movement into greater alignment with the postmodern temperament of America. Broadly, that means creating space within each movement for individual experimentation, acceptance, autonomy, adaptation and

subjective experience, while still maintaining clear values and a clear denominational mission — no easy feat!

The second option is to run counterculture and offer a differentiated alternative to the *zeitgeist* of today. While I would expect to see both alternatives, it is not at all clear to me which movement will select which path, or if we will see a realignment of movements along these lines. Of course, it is equally possible that neither of these suggestions will prove true and that that some unimagined alternatives will emerge.

Increasing Similarities

In any scenario, we would expect to see increasing similarities among the different movements as they attempt to adapt to the times. Those similarities are already abundant in denominational synagogues and are only increasing. Hebrew language and Jewish ritual have found a comfortable home within many synagogues of all movements. The use of instrumentation in *tefilot* in many liberal synagogues is common. More recently, the popularity of Carlebach-style *minyanim* in all of the different movements illustrates their attempt to offer a religious experience that speaks to the spiritual temperament of contemporary Jews.

Feminism has now had an impact on all of the denominations, including Orthodoxy. The acceptance of gay and lesbian Jews in the various movements is becoming more normative. The value of Jewish learning is now celebrated within each movement. Fundamental differences certainly still exist, both within the liberal movements and between the liberal movements and Orthodoxy. However, for the everyday Jew in the pew, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find as many bright lines of separation between the movements today.

Implications for Synagogues

What are the implications for synagogues of this merging of denominational worldview and practice? In an environment in which synagogues may become less differentiated by denominational practice, variables that pull people to synagogues will become more important. Cost, quality of educational programming, proximity, rabbinic leadership, community and personal relevance may take on greater importance in retaining and attracting members.

Ideology, while becoming more developed within each movement, will continue to play an important role — but for a decreasingly small elite. The space for non-denominational synagogues, about which we currently know little, and for *havurot*, is likely to become broader and may become increasingly attractive options for an eclectic community of people who have little taste for labels that suggest uniformity.

Many organizational issues require examination in reconstructing the synagogue of the future. The people who will inhabit the synagogue of the future need to influence the processes used within the synagogue to achieve its mission, and the organizational shape that will best allow it to express its purposes. I will only reflect on a few such issues in this paper and will elabo-

rate at greater length in a forthcoming publication.

Reexamining Synagogue Models

Synagogue business models require reexamination. More specifically, I am suggesting that there is something fundamentally wrong with a business model that invests huge amounts of capital in a facility whose worship space, which consumes a significant amount of square footage of most synagogues, is vastly underutilized except for several days each year. Large, underutilized facilities are a drag on already stressed synagogue budgets. They are one reason why synagogue dues are perceived as high barriers to entry, especially for younger generations who do not bring special feelings of loyalty to synagogues.

Could congregations downsize their building and work with Jewish Community Centers or other local facilities to meet extra-capacity services and events on the few occasions a year when they are needed? Would that enable them to offer memberships that are more affordable and more appealing programmatically? Congregations that are considering building expansions or are thinking of new buildings should especially think seriously about these kinds of questions.

Alternatively, synagogues can become incubators for innovative programs, services and organizations that are in need of space and administrative and custodial support. These are the very programs often originated by the younger people that synagogues have trouble reaching. By housing grassroots *minyanim*, social-justice organizations and cultural presenters, synagogues and such organizations can each benefit. Synagogues gain by bringing younger generations and new ideas through their doors, and grassroots organizations are able to fulfill basic organizational needs. When synagogues and agencies fail to fulfill these needs, they fail to reach their full potential.

Synagogue governance models also require reexamination and change. New ideas and initiatives are difficult to implement because of cumbersome organizational barriers and inefficiencies. Additionally, synagogues often do not give enough latitude to volunteers to take responsibility for their own Jewish needs. These are realities that need to change if younger generations are to be engaged meaningfully in synagogue life. This will be increasingly important as the fruits of Jewish experiences, like day schools, and adult Jewish learning programs, like the Wexner Heritage Program, Me'ah and the Florence Melton Mini-School for Adults, become available for harvest.

Engagement and Networking

Synagogues need to develop organizational partnerships with institutions inside and outside of the Jewish community in order to serve successfully a diverse, multigenerational community. Elsewhere,[5] I have written about the need for synagogues to network with other institutions, allowing them to expand their ability to offer services to members through collaborations with other institutions and, at the same time, focus on areas of program and service that

they are uniquely situated to provide. Given the diverse, multigenerational composition of the Jewish community today, no Jewish institution can be considered Jewishly self-sufficient, so synagogues must create these partnerships.

Equally important, they must engage with the broader community, where they practice acts of *hesed* for the broader community with people of other faith communities. Younger generations in particular do not like boundaries erected between their Jewish lives and other dimensions of their lives. Therefore, experiences that express a particular Jewish message and that happen in more universal settings will have special appeal to younger generations.

Networking, as Barry Shrage points out, also has global implications for the synagogue of the future.[5] Synagogues will have an opportunity to create an expansive feeling of *klal yisrael* by using communications technology to link themselves with communities in Israel and the former Soviet Union and in European Jewish communities. These virtual meetings will complement real-time visits already made possible by global transportation. In an age of diminished Jewish ethnicity, this networking with Jewish communities around the globe will add programmatic dynamism while also strengthening attenuated feelings of Jewish peoplehood.

Decline of Rabbinic Influence

Here, I limit my thoughts to congregational rabbis. However, a rethinking of all synagogue staff positions and functions is in order. Working with rabbis in both a local and national capacity, and having served in a congregation, I am aware of the challenges and complexities of the congregational rabbinate. Knowing these realities makes it more difficult for me to state a bold truth: Many congregational rabbis are playing an increasingly marginal role in the lives of individual Jews and in the Jewish community, and risk becoming even more out of touch with upcoming generations.

This claim can be supported by asking a few simple questions. How many hours does the average American Jew spend in the synagogue each year? While we lack scientific data, an educated guess would suggest probably somewhere between twelve and twenty hours. What percentage of dues-paying households attends Shabbat services regularly (at least twice a month)? Again, an unscientific yet educated estimate would be between 5 and 10 percent.

These estimates speak for themselves about the perceived value and relevance of synagogues today, and they are painful to accept for those who are "planted in the house of the Lord." In fact, when looking out at an unusually full congregation on a Shabbat morning, it is easy to be lulled into denial.

Limited Impact

Why is it the case that rabbis so infrequently touch the lives of their congregants? In the space of a brief essay, I can suggest only a few factors. For most synagogue-goers outside of the Orthodox world, rabbis are not called upon as halakhic decision-makers. Our unique expertise and training are not on the

agenda of most synagogue members, except on an "as-needed" basis, typically around life-cycle events and holidays.

Another fundamental reason is that real-time and on-line options for gaining information about Jewish subjects unrelated to *halakha* are available from many different sources, and younger generations are especially adept at finding the information they seek. For example, in many Jewish communities today, there are members of congregations or community members with vast areas of expertise in Hebrew language, Jewish literature, Holocaust studies, synagogue skills and even more esoteric subjects like *Kabbalah*.

Direct Access to Resources

A number of venerable Jewish publishers, including the Jewish Publication Society, newer spirituality publishers like Jewish Lights, or mainstream publishers like Random House or Harper Collins (to name but a few) offers a stunning array of Jewish books. A new, comprehensive Jewish educational website, MyJewishLearning.com, has almost completed its goal of providing an on-line library of topics that will surpass the many existing sites that can be found, many of which are themselves very helpful. Talmud, classical codes of Jewish law, *targumim* and mystical treatises—works that used to be the province of rabbinical scholars, are now open to the Jewish and general public. The democratizing impulse of the classical rabbis to make Jewish learning available to all is well on the way to being realized.

Additionally, rabbis tend to play a marginal community leadership role. Proactive community leadership more often comes from outside the congregation — from Jewish philanthropists, federations, community centers, community relations councils — but not usually from rabbis. They may play a reactive or a consultative role on community events but generally do not set the community agenda. In this environment of democratized leadership and learning, where upcoming generations will play a greater role in creating their personal, institutional and communal Jewish destiny (as some already do), what roles are left for rabbis?

Is There a Rabbi in the House?

Congregational rabbis potentially have very significant, privileged and critical roles to play on the interpersonal and communal level. In thinking of a reconstructed role for the congregational rabbi, I will draw two analogies from the field of medical practice[6] because it offers some applicable insights.[7] Perhaps that ought not to come as a surprise, for rabbis, by virtue of their ritual and pastoral roles, are given access to intimate times in people's lives, just as doctors are. As with all analogies, this one should not be pressed too far, but may be useful in helping us to conceptualize new ways of thinking about the congregational rabbinate.

Partners in Decision-Making

A cursory look at how the physician-patient paradigm has evolved may of-

fer some directions for congregational rabbis. In medical practice today, the approach of shared or participatory decision-making is in vogue. Doctors accept patient autonomy as a given, and know that their patients frequently come armed with the latest information about innovative medical tests and procedures, new drugs and cutting-edge therapies they have learned about through electronic and print media.

However, patients do not have the training and experience to filter all of this information and arrive at correct medical choices. That is where the doctor plays a critical role. Doctors take careful medical histories, perform relevant physical examinations and judiciously order lab tests. Based on their analysis, they create a treatment plan with the involvement of the patient.

Of course, this is an idealized description of the shared decision-making model of medical practice. Patient variables, including age, education and socio-economic status, may either limit or enhance a shared decision-making process. For example, older patients who have been socialized under a more paternalistic medical model may still want the doctor to make medical choices for them. Additionally, there are variables among doctors that have an impact on the successful implementation of this model, as well. Nonetheless, this model of shared decision-making is worthy of consideration when re-envisioning rabbinic roles.[8]

Promoting Spiritual Wellness

A second enriching analogy from the field of medical practice relates to the proactive promotion of wellness. When doctors meet with their patients for wellness visits, they take a comprehensive look at their lifestyles and suggest ways in which they can improve their overall health. They provide articles and information to promote a vision of a healthy person. They also give seminars targeted to segmented populations based on life stages or specific diseases. Good doctors today actively involve their patients in creating and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. They understand that through the proactive promotion of good health, they have a better chance of achieving desired patient outcomes.

Medical practice today is both reactive and proactive and, in both modes, involves patients in its processes. The state of medical practice offers some clear insights for rabbinic practice in the congregation. Congregational rabbis can use the shared decision-making model, one that is much more in keeping with the temperament of Boomers, Gen X'ers and Millenials, to help influence them at critical life junctures. The current structuring of rabbinic time allows for sickness visits, crisis care and triage. A restructuring could also create time for spiritual wellness checkups. Through different media and forums (teaching, preaching, writing, home visits, panel discussions, etc.), rabbis can take their vision of a healthy Jewish life and promote it.

Providing Alternative Values

In a democratic, non-authoritarian fashion, rabbis have a unique opportunity and privilege to throw a counter

weight to secular and sometimes dehumanizing influences and trends in our society. They can offer an alternative set of values, a different lens through which to evaluate the most important life choices and a different life agenda for members of the Jewish community.

They can do so on an individual level through meetings with congregants, and on a congregational level through the various media and forums that a congregation provides. They can also take their vision to a broader Jewish public if they will make the time to remain consistently involved in key communal institutions and not just appear when a particular item of interest of theirs is a hot community topic. I believe that these kinds of roles are special privileges of a congregational rabbi and that this work is *avodat kodesh* (sacred service) at the highest level.

However, in order to work at this, in addition to talking about ritual matters that are of concern to us (Shabbat observance, *kashrut* and *tefilah*), we also have to speak more frequently about issues that are of concern to congregants and community members. We need to learn better how to integrate an understanding of human developmental stages into programming, teaching and spiritual counseling. We have to craft differentiated interpersonal approaches to a multigenerational congregation. And all of this must be done with love and empathy.

Rabbinical schools are likely to be slow to incorporate this kind of approach into a curriculum and program, as are many rabbis, because of our spiritual, emotional and personal investment in existing rabbinical roles. But there are some gifted rabbis who model this kind of compassionate, relevant, living Torah. If ever a discussion of lay leaders, rabbis and rabbinical school administrators was needed, now is the time to engage in strategic thinking and acting in redefining the unique roles that rabbis can especially play in the Jewish community. Absent such a discussion, it is likely that ongoing marginalization of the rabbinate will continue unchecked.

The Use of Creative Tension

For some, change and innovation are exhilarating. People who are wired for change thrive on the recombination of new ideas and believe in a world of infinite possibilities. For many more, change lies along a spectrum between difficult and terrifying. While America in particular has a bias in favor of innovation, tradition is also an honored category within Judaism.

Synagogues, regardless of denominational affiliation, are charged with conserving, preserving, adapting and transmitting the tradition. Innovation, when it comes, occurs most often through a process of evolutionary reinterpretation, which is what gives continuity to the Jewish tradition. Therefore, as the future unfolds, we should expect to feel continued tension between the great need for reconstruction of the synagogue and for continuity of the synagogue as we know it today. The continued relevance of the synagogue will be determined by those who use the tension as a force for creativity and growth.

1. All of these items are taken from J. Barker, *Paradigms. The Business of Discovering the Future* (New York, HarperBusiness, 1993), 89.

2. J. Caroll and W. Roof Carroll, *Bridging Divided Worlds. Generational Cultures in Congregations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 6.

3. E. Neuborne and K. Kerwin, "Generation Y" (February 15, 1999, online). Available: http://www.businessweek.com/@@0QC1pocQo1GWHBEA/1999/99_07/b3616001.htm; R. Zemke, C. Raines, and B. Filipczak, *Generations at Work* (New York: Amacom, 2000); P. Paul, "Inside Generation Y: Understanding America's Vast New Market" (August 30, 2001, online). Available: at www.inside.com/product/product.asp?pf_id={D4D64B67-881C-4E54-A5BD-35E.

4. Amy Sales, *Jewish Youth Databook: Research on adolescence and its implications for Jewish teen programs* (Boston: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies/Brandeis University, 1996); Nancy Leffert and Hayim Herring, *Shema: Listening to Jewish Youth* (Search Institute: Minneapolis, MN, 1997); Steven Cohen, *Religious Stability and Ethnic Decline: Emerging Patterns of Jewish Identity in the United States* (New York: The Jewish Community Centers Association,1998); Charles Kadushin, Shaul Kelner and Leonard Saxe, *Being a Jewish Teenager in America: Trying to Make It* (Boston: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 2000); Barry Kosmin, "Coming of Age in the Conservative Synagogue: The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Class of 5755," in J. Wertheimer, ed., *Jews in the Center: Conservative Synagogues and Their Members* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 232-268; L. Sax, *America's Jewish Freshman: Current Characteristics and Recent Trends among Students Entering College* (Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute/University of California, 2002).

5. H. Herring and B. Shrage, *Jewish Networking: Linking People, Institutions, Community* (Boston: Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies, 2001).

6. I wish to thank Dr. Hanna Bloomfield Rubins, Professor of Medicine at the University of Minnesota, for her assistance with this section.

7. Other disciplines also offer insights that are instructive for the rabbinate. For example, in high-quality service organizations, service providers will meet with clients on a regular basis to anticipate emerging needs and to suggest new services that may be of help to them as they evolve.

8. The Reconstructionist movement has made a concerted effort to explore the rabbi-congregant relationship. See *The Rabbi-Congregation Relationship: A Vision for the 21st Century* (Philadelphia: The Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi, 2001).

Reading *Toevah:* Biblical Scholarship and Difficult Texts[1]

By Seth Goldstein

One of the hallmarks of contemporary Reconstructionist Judaism is the acceptance and celebration of gays and lesbians as full members of the Jewish community. Yet one of the major obstacles to complete integration is that, while our moral attitudes may develop over time, leading to different decisions regarding status and ritual access, our primary sacred texts remain the same. It is then up to the reader-text interaction — the interpretation — to redeem and reconstruct these texts whose actual words are immutable. New reading strategies are necessary to deal with and understand these texts.

The core difficult texts regarding gays and lesbians in the Jewish community are in the Torah, in Leviticus: Homosexual sex is labeled a *toevah* — an "abomination." This has lead to a chain of interpretive tradition that has banned gay and lesbian coupling and relationships and, by extension, full participation by gays and lesbians in the Jewish community. But perhaps the way to reexamine these texts is not to look forward but to look back; not to redirect the stream of traditional interpretation, but to take another look at its source, the *Tanakh* itself.

Fluid Texts

The development of biblical texts was fluid, and texts can be read as reactions to and adaptations of other texts. The narrative texts, the legal codes, the historical accounts, the prophetic books and the wisdom literature all reflect each other, some in their original creation and others in their final redaction.

It is sometimes possible to see this fluidity in action, and the meaning of the word *toevah* is a good example. Through a close examination of this term (usually translated as "abomination" or "abhorrence"[2]) throughout biblical literature, one can see continual reinterpretation, evidence of textual interaction and of the complexity of the biblical redaction. To understand fully the word *toevah*, it is necessary to look at its usage throughout the entirety of biblical literature.

Toevah appears in scattered refer-

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ences throughout the Bible, but predominantly in three books: Deuteronomy, Ezekiel and Proverbs. Outside of the two instances where *toevah* appears as a ban on male coupling, the word appears only in two other places in Leviticus. Looking beyond Leviticus to the entirety of uses in biblical literature reveals nuances about the word's meaning that have implications for how it can be understood today.

The Book of Proverbs

While found toward the end of the Hebrew Bible, Proverbs contains some of the oldest biblical material, and the case of *toevah* is no exception. *Toevah* is prevalent in Proverbs and is found most often in those sections that have been deemed by scholars to be from the period before the exile (586 BCE, i.e., early in the scope of biblical literature).[3]

In Proverbs, *toevah* has a universal moral definition. It is used to define immoral behaviors, such as lying (12:22), haughtiness (16:5), acquitting the guilty and convicting the innocent (17:15), using false weights and measures (i.e. immoral business dealings) (20:10) and general wickedness (15:9).

The following passage is representative of the usage of *toevah* in Proverbs:

> Six things the LORD hates
> Seven are an abomination (*toevah*)
> to Him:
> A haughty bearing,
> A lying tongue,
> Hands that shed innocent blood,
> A mind that hatches evil plots,
> Feet quick to run to evil,
> A false witness testifying lies,
> And one who incites brothers
> to quarrel. (6:16-19)

In addition to referring to morality, *toevah* in Proverbs has a universal tone. The abominations listed are not cultic nor are they Israel-specific. As Jacob Milgrom writes, "In Proverbs . . . the setting is exclusively ethical and universal but never ritual or national."[4] That which is inappropriate for all people is considered an abomination. The universal moral nature of the word is further evidenced by the fact that, as pointed out by R. E. Clements and Jean L'Hour, *toevah* has an antonym in the word *ratzon* ("desire").[5] An example of this parallelism is in the aforementioned verse against lying, Proverbs 12:22: –"Lying speech is an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully please Him (*retzono*)." Lying is an abomination to God, while telling the truth is God's will.

This verse is also evidence of the way *toevah* is used in Proverbs — the word sometimes appears on its own but is sometimes qualified as part of a *smichut* (conjunctive) phrase construction. Proverbs 12:22 says that lying is not just an abomination (*toevah*), it is an abomination to God (*toevat*-YHVH). Thus, an action deemed immoral is labeled also as an affront to God: "The social sanction present in human feelings of abhorrence and the sense of grievance at the suffering of moral injury are feelings also shared by the deity."[6] Indeed, it can be said that this specific association with the disapproval of God is what gives an action its moral significance.[7]

The Book of Deuteronomy

The second biblical book that contains many uses of *toevah* is Deuteronomy. The prevalent use of *toevah* in both Proverbs and Deuteronomy suggests a relationship between the two literary traditions, a relationship that most scholars agree involves the Deuteronomist borrowing the term from the author of Proverbs.[8]

In Proverbs, what was a *toevah* or a *toevat*-YHVH was considered a universal moral statement; in Deuteronomy, *toevah* is a referent of national identity. The usage in Deuteronomy is most commonly associated with practices that would distinguish Israel from other nations — that which the other nations do is deemed an abomination.

The offense that is most often labeled *toevah* in Deuteronomy is idolatry. For example:

> You shall consign the images of their gods to the fire; you shall not covet the silver and gold on them and keep it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared thereby; for that is abhorrent (*toevah*) to the Lord your God. You must not bring an abhorrent thing into your house, or you will be proscribed like it; you must reject it as abominable (*sheketz*) and abhorrent (*toevah*) for it is proscribed. (7:25-6)[9]

Idolatry is not labeled as abhorrent or an abomination because it is a moral violation, or even because it constitutes a rejection of YHWH. It is labeled as abhorrent because it is a foreign practice. Idolatry is non-Israelite, so is therefore a *toevah*.[10] By using the term, the Deuteronomic author is drawing a boundary between Israel and other nations. That boundary is in a sense justified because the foreign practice is labeled a *toevat*-YHVH, an abomination to God. While in Proverbs a moral wrong is identified as being a *toevat*-YHVH, in Deuteronomy *toevah* is the signifier of a non-Israelite practice.

Additional Dimensions of *Toevah*

Toevah in Deuteronomy is also used to proscribe other culturally specific practices, such as sorcery and soothsaying (18:9-14), the interdiction against which is accompanied by an exhortation "not to be like the other nations." Other objects and practices that are labeled as a *toevah* include forbidden animals (14:3), the use of blemished animals in sacrifice (17:1), transvestitism (22:5) and prostitution (23:19). While some scholars have attempted to link these "abominations," either through labeling them all as idolatrous cultic practices or as all representing "the two-faced or hypocritical attitude of the malefactor,"[11] the reason why these are listed as *toevot* is beside the point. (Just because several practices are labeled a *toevah* does not necessarily mean those practices are related.)

What is important is that these practices are cultural. They do not address fundamental issues such as justice, lying, haughtiness or evil. Rather, they address issues such as diet, fashion and worship. The sense of the word *toevah* has shifted in emphasis from the uni-

versally moral to the particularly national.

Thus, what was intimated in Proverbs is made clear in Deuteronomy — a *toevah*, while identified by YHVH, is from a human perspective a socially constructed boundary. This is made even clearer by examining a specific *toevah* that is cited in both Proverbs and Deuteronomy, that of unfair weights and measures. The verse in Proverbs reads, "False weights and false measures, both are an abomination to the Lord." (20:22) The concept is expanded in Deuteronomy:

> You shall not have in your pouch alternate weights, larger and smaller. You shall not have in your house alternate measures, a larger and a smaller. You must have completely honest weights and completely honest measures, if you are to endure long on the soil that the Lord your God is giving you. For everyone who does those things, everyone who deals dishonestly, is abhorrent to the Lord your God. (25:13-16)

From Universal to Particular

This is an example in which the Deuteronomic author takes a general moral rule and makes it nationally specific. Having honest weights is no longer "the right thing to do;" it is an act upon which the national sovereignty of Israel depends. As Jean L'Hour notes, this is an example of a wisdom tradition, in which Israel needs to distinguish itself from other national groups, making its moral laws into national ones.[12] What was once universal is now used to create "Otherness." That is, the word is now used to create cultural group boundaries, delineating between those who are "in," or part of the group, and those who are "out," or Other. This is the essence of the semantic shift made in Deuteronomy.[13]

What was once a moral wrong, or a sin against God, is now a cultural wrong, or a sin against Israel. As William McKane notes, "If a direct literary relationship is assumed between Deuteronomy and Proverbs in respect of this formula, the dependence is probably on the side of Deuteronomy, which, however, has pressed it into the service of a new cause and has put it to work in the interests of the exclusiveness of the cult of Yahweh."[14]

We can take this argument one step further. The appropriation of *toevah* by the Deuteronomist from a general moral category to a specific national meaning effects a two-way transfer of meaning. By using *toevah*, the Deuteronomist is at once changing the meaning of a word, while at the same time retaining its prior association. So while the Deuteronomist uses *toevah* to apply to a violation of a national boundary, something that is not Israelite but Canaanite, not Us but Other, the use of that word applies a veil of universal morality across that national boundary.[15] Evidence that a word can move away from but never truly shed its semantic past will be seen as *toevah* is picked up by the prophet Ezekiel.

The Book of Ezekiel

Toevah is also common in Ezekiel.

Again, based on this alone, a link between Deuteronomy and Ezekiel can be assumed. This link, however, is not as direct as that between Proverbs and Deuteronomy; this link has multiple steps. Ezekiel has been associated by scholars with the Priestly School (P) responsible for the Holiness Code (H), which some scholars now believe to be a response to Deuteronomy.[16] If this is the case, then the biblical authors associated with part of the Holiness school, including Ezekiel, had access to the Deuteronomic material. Like the Deuteronomic author (D) before him, Ezekiel altered the word's meaning to fit his purpose.

Toevah is used forty-three times by Ezekiel. Certain chapters — 7, 8 and 16 — use the term several times, and these uses are exemplary. In chapter 7, Ezekiel receives a prophecy of doom from God because of the "arrogance," "lawlessness" and "wickedness" perpetrated by the Israelites. They are to be doomed because of their abominations:

> Now doom is upon you! I will let loose My anger against you and judge you according to your ways; I will requite you for all your abominations (*toavotaikh*). I will show you no pity and no compassion; but I will requite you for your ways and for the abominations (*toavotaikh*) in your midst. And you shall know that I am the Lord. (7:3-4)

What is specifically meant by abominations is mentioned later in the chapter: "for out of their beautiful adornments, in which they took pride, they made their images and their detestable abominations (*toavotam*)." (7:20) Here, the word *toevah* is used to describe idolatry, as it was in Deuteronomy.

Visionary Tour

Chapter 8 also makes this point clear. In this chapter, the narrative portrays God taking Ezekiel on a tour of the Jerusalem Temple to show him all of the evildoings of the Israelites. These evildoings are idolatrous practices, labeled by the author as *toevot*:

> And he said to me, "O mortal, turn your eyes northward." I turned my eyes northward and there, north of the gate of the altar, was that infuriating image on the approach. And He said to me, "Mortal, do you see what they are doing, the terrible abominations (*toevot*) that the House of Israel is practicing here, to drive me far from My Sanctuary: You shall yet see even greater abominations (*toevot*)!" (8:5-6)

Several other descriptions of idolatrous practices occurring on the Temple grounds follow, and it is clear that *toevah* in Ezekiel is not used to indicate moral offenses, but rather specific cultic ones. The "abomination" of the Israelites that will eventually bring their downfall is the turning away from God toward idols, a practice undertaken even in God's holy place, the Temple.

Turning Away From God

There is a semantic difference in the

use of the word, however, between Deuteronomy and Ezekiel. Both refer to idolatry, but while in Deuteronomy the practice of idolatry is defined as turning toward other nations, in Ezekiel it is defined as turning away from God. Explicit reference to other nations is not made in Ezekiel. This is a subtle yet significant shift. As Paul Humbert writes, "reaction against Canaanism in Deuteronomy, violation of the sacred in Ezekiel; opposition of Yahweh and Canaanite paganism in Deuteronomy, opposition of the profane and the sacred in Ezekiel."[17]

The focus in Ezekiel is internal, not external. This is in line with what we understand to be the relationship between P/H and D. For if P is a reaction to D, then the authors of that school already accept the centralization of the cult. There is no need to distinguish Israel as a nation, because that distinction has already been made. From Ezekiel's perspective, idolatry is a threat to internal order, not necessarily to national security. Indeed, Ezekiel is assumed to have been active during the exile, and his words were addressed to an exilic community, a historical situation in which there was no sovereign nation to keep secure, and in which maintaining communal identity was paramount. This contrasts with Deuteronomy, which was written during the pre-exilic time of the monarchy and national sovereignty.

It is interesting to note, as Humbert does, that there are not many strong linguistic parallels between Deuteronomy and Ezekiel outside of the use of *toevah*. However, it is not surprising that since Ezekiel and his Priestly School are reacting to Deuteronomy that *toevah* would be a word that is emphasized. Ezekiel retains the meaning of *toevah* as the violation of a cultural boundary; it is a pivotal word representing violations of the Israelite order. Yet while this is clearly spelled out in Deuteronomy through explicit reference to other nations, the social boundary meaning is assumed in Ezekiel: To commit a *toevah* is to go against God and the cult, and therefore not to act in a proper Israelite fashion. In addition, while the phrase *toevat*-YHVH is found in Deuteronomy, it is absent in Ezekiel, where *toevah* stands on its own. We can assume that the specific qualification is no longer needed, the word having assumed a culturally specific meaning.

Marriage Metaphor

A key use in Ezekiel is in chapter 16, in which the prophet puts forth a marriage metaphor. Jerusalem is depicted as a female orphan whom God raises to maturity. God then marries her, but she "plays the harlot." God threatens to bring all her lovers against her in violent revenge. The metaphor is meant to represent in a sexually explicit manner the charges brought against the people by Ezekiel: A woman who is adulterous represents a nation that strays from its God.

The meaning of the metaphor is signaled as well by the use of the word *toevah*, which is used to describe the actions of the woman. Chapter 16 opens with God telling Ezekiel, "O mortal, proclaim Jerusalem's abominations to

her (*toavoteha*)" (16:2), and later, "In all your abominations (*toavotaikh*) and harlotries, you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, and lay wallowing in your blood." (16:22) *Toevah* is indicative of non-Israelite idolatrous practices, the performance of which constitute a rejection of God. By calling the sexual practices of the woman in the metaphor a *toevah*, it is a signal to the reader that idolatrous practices are being referenced.[18]

But that is only half of the issue. In the context of the marriage metaphor, *toevah* becomes instantly nuanced — beyond "idolatry," *toevah* is now sexualized. While *toevah* still serves as a cultic reference in this context, it also takes on the meaning of harlotry, associated with sexual impropriety.

In different contexts, *toevah* undergoes a semantic shift. The move from Proverbs to Deuteronomy resulted in a shift from the universal-moral to the particular-national, a move resulting in the *toevah* practices of the non-Israelite nations also now having the tone of immorality. The semantic shift in Ezekiel sees *toevah* referring to idolatrous, non-Israelite practices — violations of the social construction that is the Israelite cult — and this sense of "violations of the social construction" is interpreted in terms of sexual impropriety. This semantic shift is important in understanding how *toevah* operates in Leviticus.

The Book of Leviticus

The use of *toevah* in Leviticus is limited to a few instances, and those are contained solely in the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26). Scholars assume there exists a connection between the book of Ezekiel and the Holiness School.

The word *toevah* is used primarily in Leviticus 18 and 20 to refer only to specifically sexual offenses. The two chapters have similar structures: A series of mostly sexual offenses is named, followed by a concluding paragraph exhorting the Israelites not to follow the practices of the people who preceded them in the land. It was these offenses that caused the land to expel those people, and if the Israelites engage in them, they, too, will be expelled.

None of the other specific offenses listed in chapters 18 or 20 (except for the prohibition against homosexual conduct) is called a *toevah*. Saul Olyan notes that all of the other sexual prohibitions have parallels in other biblical legal traditions, save for the ban on homosexuality. He concludes, therefore, "there is no reason to assume any necessary association between the prohibitions of male couplings found in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 and the various incest, adultery, and bestiality interdictions present in the same legal contexts. If there is a link, it must be the result of transmission and/or redactorial intention."[19] This link is not only made by the placement of the prohibition against male coupling next to the other sexual offenses, but also by the use of the word *toevah* in the conclusion to chapter 18. The conclusion calls the sexual offenses *toevot*, but they are not labeled *toevot* in the body of the laws. This appears to be an attempt by a later

redactor to link a pre-existing body of sexual offenses with the word *toevah,* despite it not being indigenous to the original list of sexual improprieties.[20]

This connection could have been made because of the use of *toevah* in Ezekiel 16: Because it is sexualized there, it can then be applied to sexual improprieties. At the same time, *toevah* still maintains the meaning assumed when it meant solely idolatrous practices — that of a violation of a socially constructed boundary. This is also evidenced by the surrounding verses in the conclusion of chapter 18, which attribute the abhorrent practices to "the other nations." As noted by E. Gerstenberger, this is a Deuteronomic concept imported into the Holiness Code, since nowhere else in P does the law refer to others as it does in the conclusion of chapter 18.[21] This insertion could have been made by a redactor from the Holiness School who had familiarity with the texts of Deuteronomy and was influenced by the sexualization of the word in Ezekiel. What is important to note for the later association of homosexuality with *toevah* is that the redactor is labeling all of the proscribed sexual acts as violations of a socially constructed boundary.

Because male coupling is the only practice specifically labeled a *toevah*, and because the word appears out of place with the other sexual offenses, male coupling could have had another meaning aside from being a sexual violation prior to being grouped in Leviticus 18 and 20. By *toevah*, male coupling is labeled a societal boundary violation, but the reason for this is not immediately apparent.[22]

The use of *toevah* is not indigenous, nor is it a common word in, the Holiness Code. Its association with the list of sexual offenses is the result of a redactor's effort to label all of the offenses as violations of the socially constructed boundary, a status that previously was reserved primarily for idolatry. The association of the word with sexual offenses labels those offenders not merely "bad" but "Other." This understanding of the word and its provenance can give us new insight into our contemporary view of the text in Leviticus.

Contemporary Implications

Our analysis suggests that in the transmission and shifts in the meaning of *toevah*, what has often been translated as "abomination" or "abhorrent" actually refers to a socially constructed boundary. Even from its earliest uses in Proverbs, *toevah* meant something that was not socially acceptable. Something that was "immoral," such as lying or haughtiness, crossed "God's boundary." When adapted by the Deuteronomist, *toevah* took on the meaning of specific practices that were not socially acceptable, such as idolatry. It was used to describe something that was of the foreign nations.

When it was adopted by Ezekiel, *toevah* retained the meaning of idolatry (a practice that was not socially acceptable) but the focus shifted to something that was not in line with proper Israelite practice. Through its association with the marriage metaphor in Ezekiel, *toevah* became sexualized and thus ap-

pears in Leviticus completely divorced from its earlier cultic context to refer to socially unacceptable sexual practices. The word *toevah* never meant something that was in and of itself bad, but something that was bad because it was offensive to a population.[23]

In addition, its use in Leviticus, where it is not a common word nor used in a systematic way, is tangential to the overall picture of the place of *toevah* in biblical literature. The tying of the word to male coupling seems incongruous with its other uses in a moral (Proverbs) or cultic/national (Deuteronomy, Ezekiel) context.

How does biblical scholarship affect our modern day decision-making as Reconstructionist Jews? The Reconstructionist approach is to view Judaism as a continuously evolving religious civilization. The literary output of each successive stage of that civilization, including the Bible, with its attributed human authorship, must be viewed in context. Understanding of the Bible in its context, through historical and literary analysis, would help formulate a Reconstructionist approach to the text. Modern tools of biblical scholarship inform our contemporary decisions about Judaism.

Gay and Lesbian Jews

This is the situation in approaching the issue of gay and lesbian Jews. A primary value of Reconstructionism is inclusivity and therefore no level of activity within the Jewish community, including the rabbinate, is restricted because of sexual orientation. How then, do we approach and understand Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13? While the Reconstructionist movement addressed this in its 1993 report, *Homosexuality and Judaism: The Reconstructionist Position,* I wish to propose an additional approach.

The Reconstructionist report never challenges the attachment of the word *toevah* to male coupling, but only the descriptive clause in the Leviticus verse — "lie with a male as one lies with a woman." This phrase is reinterpreted in light of changing cultural definitions of homosexual sex and relationships.

This is a legitimate reading strategy. If we take the biblical text in its context, we can argue that since cultural norms are different today than when the text was written, references to specific cultural practices may differ in meaning. A clear example of this is another prohibition labeled *toevah*: the prohibition against transvestitism in Deuteronomy 22:5. Since the prohibition does not describe specific articles of clothing, what qualifies as "men's clothing" and "woman's clothing" must be culturally bound and interpreted by a community in a specific time and place. By definition, this prohibition is subject to interpretation and adjustment.

But focusing solely on the descriptive clause is akin to never taking sodomy laws off the books (as they still exist in some American states), but merely redefining what sodomy is. The report of the Reconstructionist Commission on Homosexuality, in its examination of biblical texts, neglects to take a comprehensive view of the word *toevah*.

Perhaps it is not the first part of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 that should be subject to reinterpretation, but the second. The report says, "why sexuality was a core issue for the elaboration of the *toevot* is subject to speculation."[24]

As shown in this study, however, this statement is erroneous — sexuality was never a core issue for *toevot*. Sexuality is a tangential issue for the elaboration of *toevot* — the link was the result of a late, incongruous redaction. Seen in the context of biblical literature, the core concern of *toevah* was idolatry and foreign cultic practices. This is its meaning in both Deuteronomy and Ezekiel, after having adopted a moral term from Proverbs. Using this understanding, we can examine the biblical ban on homosexuality by focusing not on the first half of the phrase, the description of the act, but on the second, the attribution of *toevah* status.

Toevah is what is unacceptable to the community — i.e., what is inherently dangerous to one's identity as an Israelite. Using this understanding (revealed through a critical biblical analysis), we can reinterpret biblical text, maintaining some notions but discarding others.

No Longer an "Abomination"

What threatens Judaism and Jewish practice can be maintained as an "abomination," but what does not threaten Judaism and Jewish practice can no longer be considered an "abomination." The general category of *toevah* is useful and should be maintained; what constitutes *toevah* can change. These decisions are made by considering the text along with one's current cultural norms, since, by definition, a culturally determined boundary violation can change as one's culture changes. We are continually drawing and redrawing boundaries.

In consideration of current thinking, and looking at the texts in front of us, we can draw new conclusions. Judaism's commitment to monotheism and the unity of God as expressed in the Shema is unchanged. Practicing idolatry and worshiping other gods is inherently dangerous to identity as an Israelite. It threatens Judaism and Jewish practice, and therefore its status as *toevah* must be upheld.

On the other hand, general cultural attitudes toward gays and lesbians have changed. While complete civil equality has yet to be attained, in the minds of many, sexual orientation has proven not to be a deterrent to one's ability to develop and maintain relationships, to be members of and create families or to be full participants in communities and their leadership. Judaism has and must continue to meet these changing norms by opening up the synagogue doors and the pulpit to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Jews. Being gay is not inherently dangerous to one's identity as an Israelite and does not threaten Judaism or Jewish practice, and therefore its status as *toevah* must be abrogated.[25]

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1. This essay was originally written while I was a student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, and special thanks are due to my instructor in Bible, S. Tamar Kamionkowski, who paved the way for meaningful

critical inquiry, and my colleague Hugh Seid Valencia, whose own work informed mine. I also wish to acknowledge Rabbi Richard Hirsh and Rabbi David Teutsch, as well as the members of the RRC Family Values Study Group (2000-2001), for their insights and comments.

2. The etymology of the word has been the source of debate for scholars, and is beyond the scope of this examination. For a summary of the debate, see E. Gerstenberger, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.* eds. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 1431. All English translations in this paper are taken from the JPS translation, though this is a traditional translation with which this essay takes issue.

3. See, for example, Norman Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 571. Jacob Milgrom also notes this. (Jacob Milgrom, "Abomination," *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 1971 ed.)

4. Milgrom, *ibid.*, 97.

5. R. E. Clements, "The Concept of Abomination in the Book of Proverbs," in *Texts, Temples and Traditions*, ed. M. Fox et al. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbraun, 1996), 217. Jean L'Hour, "*Les Interdits To'eba dans le Deutéronome,*" *Revue Biblique* 71 (1964), 481-503.

6. Clements, *ibid.*, 215.

7. This construction in Proverbs parallels its apparent source, the Egyptian wisdom literature, specifically, the text "The Wisdom of Amenemope." This text classifies taboos as an abomination of specific deities, using a *smichut*-type form. William Hallo notes cognates in Sumerian literature as well. [William Hallo, "Biblical Abominations and Sumerian Taboos," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 76/1 (July 1985), 38.]

8. While some scholars such as Clements and Hallo argue for either a parallel development or the reverse, based on the work of Moshe Weinfeld, Jean L'Hour and Jacob Milgrom, among others, it is assumed that the usage in Proverbs is older. "We have seen, therefore, that in all instances, in which deuteronomic [sic] passages have clear and literal parallels in wisdom literature, the wisdom prescriptions prove to be in a more natural and original context." [M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) 274.] Also see Stephen A. Geller "Fiery Wisdom: Logos and Lexis in Deuteronomy 4," *Prooftexts* 14 (1994): 103-139 on Deuteronomy adopting and adapting tropes of Wisdom literature.

9. The word *sheketz* is a synonym to *toevah*. See Milgrom, E.J. and Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy.*

10. The earliest appearance of *toevah* in Deuteronomy, 32:16, reflects idolatry. It should also be noted that the word is used several times in the Deuteronomic history (I Kings, II Kings) to refer to idolatry.

11. Weinfeld, *op. cit.*, 268.

12. L'Hour, *op. cit.,* 500.

13. Perhaps the linguistic groundwork for this reading of the word was already laid in Proverbs by the use of the *smikhut*. An immoral act is a *toevat*-YHVH. While the intention is universality, this can be read subjectively. Other examples in Proverbs of universal messages placed in subjective language include: "The unjust man is an abomination to the righteous, and he whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked" (29:27) and "To turn away from evil is abhorrent to the stupid" (13:19) and "wicked deeds are an abomination to kings" (16:12).

14. William McKane, *Proverbs,* Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 301-2.

15. A modern example of this type of linguistic fluidity is in the current American policy debate of the use of the death pen-

alty. Anti-death-penalty advocates will use the phrase "cruel and unusual" to describe the practice, which labels the death penalty as bad and wrong while at the same time implies its alleged unconstitutionality. One phrase imparts the sense of both morality and legality.

16. For example, Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); R. E. Clements, "The Ezekiel Tradition: Prophecy in a Time of Crisis," in *Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honor of Peter Ackroyd,* ed. Richard Coggins et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); B. Levine, "The Epilogue to the Holiness Code: A Priestly Statement of the Destiny of Israel," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, ed. J. Neusner et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); S. R. Driver, A*n Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928).

17. Paul Humbert, "*Le substantif to'eba et le verbe t'b dans L'Ancien Testament*" *Zeitschrift f. d. altestamentliche Wissenschaft 72* (1960),231 (translation mine).

18. The word *toevah* is also used in Ezekiel 23, another place where a sexual metaphor is used to describe Israel's idolatrous conduct: "Then the Lord said to me: O mortal, arraign Oholah and Oholibah, and charge them with their abominations (*toavoteihen*). For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands, truly they have committed adultery with their fetishes, and have even offered to them as food the children they bore to Me." (23:36)

19. Saul M. Olyan, "And With a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman: On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5/2 (1994),182-3.

20. Knohl assigns the entirety of chapter 18 to the Holiness School [Knohl, *op. cit.,* 113], and while this may be the case, a close examination reveals that there are strata within this chapter, and that it probably was not an originally independent unit. [Olyan, *op. cit.,* 188 n. 25]. Indeed, *toevah* appears to be tangential to the rest of the text. This can be seen through a comparison of chapters 18 and 20. Both address similar topics; however, the language is different. Chapter 18 uses the word *toevah*. Chapter 20 uses the word *ḥok*, or practice. Indeed, the conclusion in chapter 18 differs from its prologue. There, the author uses the words *ḥok* and *ma'aseh*, deed. The fact that the language is different among three paragraphs that have the same theme and function points to the fact that the conclusion in chapter 18 may have a different redactor than these paragraphs and, indeed, from the rest of the chapter [Olyan, *ibid.,* 180 n. 3]. It is possible that the prologue of chapter 18 and the conclusion of chapter 20 are from the same redactor. Chapter 20 does not have a general introduction. This prohibition, mentioned twice (18:22 and 20:13) may have come from a different source than the rest of the sexual improprieties, and possibly the same source as the conclusion of Leviticus 18.

21. E. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus,* Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.), 256.

22. The question of why this specific act is labeled a *toevah* is beyond the scope of this study, but one suggestion can be made. If Ezekiel 16 is not merely about idolatrous practices but also about violating traditional gender boundaries, as S. Tamar Kamionkowski has recently suggested, then the association of gender reversal with the word *toevah* would then make it appropriate for that word to be associated with male coupling, which can also be seen as a violation of traditional gender norms. The marriage metaphor in Ezekiel and the prohibition against male coupling are linked through

the word *toevah*. [S. Tamar Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2003).]

23. This aspect is also evidenced in the few times the word is found in Genesis and Exodus. These uses describe practices that are an abomination to Egyptians, specifically. The first is when Joseph, reunited with his brothers, sits to dine with them: "They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; for the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians [*toevah he l'mitzrayim*]." (Gen. 43:32) Later in the narrative, when Jacob comes to Egypt, Joseph has them settle in Goshen because "all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians [*toevat mitzrayim*]." (Gen. 46:34) And in Exodus, Moses asks for a leave for the Israelites so they could sacrifice in the desert "for what we sacrifice to the Lord our God is untouchable to the Egyptians [*toevat mitzrayim*]." (Ex. 8:22)

24. Reconstructionist Commission on Homosexuality, *Homosexuality and Judaism: The Reconstructionist Position* (Wyncote, PA: Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot, 1992), 19.

The New Rabbi and the New Rabbinate

The New Rabbi: A Congregation Searches for Its Leader
by Stephen Fried
New York, New York: Bantam Books, 2000

Review-Essay by Allen Glicksman

To be an active American Jew is to be an organized American Jew. Few Jewish communities of the past or present could boast of the number of possible organizational affiliations available to someone with the interest (and, not unimportantly, the funds) to affiliate. For many American Jews, their list of affiliations is, indeed, their only expression of their Jewishness.

Nonetheless, given the way most social scientists study Jewish life in the United States, one might never guess the critical role of organizational affiliation. The focus of most research on American Jewry has been on the impact of "identity," that is, the influence of values and beliefs of American Jews on various behaviors, including ritual behavior, denominational affiliation (independent of synagogue membership), visiting Israel and, most important, one's choice of marriage partner.

Focus on Identity

This focus on identity emerges from the agenda of the organizations, primarily the federations that sponsor much of the research on the American Jewish community. These organizations want to understand more about the reasons American Jews choose to (or choose not to) affiliate with the Jewish community. The method of choice to accomplish this goal has been the community (or national) population survey.

These studies, conducted through phone interviews, allow planners and researchers to estimate the size of the Jewish community in a given geographic area and to identify some of the social, economic and religious characteristics of that population. One drawback, however, is that in a short phone interview, a person can be asked about organizational membership but not the personal meaning of that membership.

The lack of research on the day-to-day experience of being active in an American Jewish institution is unfortunate, because it is in those experiences that most of daily American Jewish life

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is to be found. Nowhere is this problem more apparent than in the lack of research on the most important American Jewish institution, the synagogue. This does not mean that there is a general lack of articles and books on contemporary synagogue life. Quite the contrary, there has been a continuing literature on the subject from rabbis, congregants and others involved in community life. But except for a few key publications, such as Samuel Heilman's *The Synagogue*,[1] social scientists have focused little of their research on synagogue life.

Synagogue Transformation

Why should a lack of studies of communal institutions, especially the synagogue, be of concern to American Jews? The key reason is that the role of the synagogue in the lives of American Jews is undergoing a vast transformation. As I will describe later in this essay, the expectations that congregations have of their rabbis, their synagogues and the rabbinic and congregational umbrella organizations have already begun to change. We need to develop a better understanding of these changes if we are to plan for the community's institutional future.

It is in this larger context that we need to consider Stephen Fried's *The New Rabbi: A Congregation Searches for Its Leader.* The basic story is a simple one. Har Zion Temple in Penn Valley, PA, one of the most prestigious Conservative synagogues in the United States, needed to find a new senior rabbi to succeed Rabbi Gerald Wolpe, who, after several decades at the congregation, had announced his retirement. Fried, a journalist, chronicles the process by which the congregation sought to hire a new rabbi. The process ended unexpectedly, with the hiring of the person who was then serving as the congregation's assistant rabbi.[2]

A second theme that runs through the book is a story of fathers and sons. Fried's father died soon before the book was written, and it was his need to say *kaddish* for his father that led him to Har Zion. Wolpe had previously been the rabbi in the congregation where Fried grew up, and Wolpe himself was young when his own father died.

The book also illuminates other issues, albeit unintentionally: Fried identifies many of the specific changes appearing in American synagogues. Although Fried did not set out to analyze these issues, his book provides an important illustration of current trends.

The Changing American Rabbinate

Fried recognized that Har Zion was in a process of transition. But he did not recognize that the selection process revealed a more basic transition that was occurring in many American synagogues. This more basic transformation in synagogue life affects the roles of all players on the synagogue stage, including the rabbi, the cantor, the membership and even the umbrella organizations for the various professional and lay groups associated with the synagogue.

That more fundamental change, not in any way restricted to Har Zion, is a process of turning inward, in which the synagogue comes to exist to meet the

individual needs of each congregant. This is in contrast to the traditional role of the synagogue as a communal institution that each congregant must support to be a member of the larger Jewish community. It is this changing focus, from community to individual, that informs most of the key changes in American synagogue life that are documented in the book.

The rabbi of the contemporary congregation is expected to play a complex role in this new form of synagogue life. On the one hand, the rabbi is expected to be a chief executive officer (CEO). This transfers onto the rabbi much responsibility from the synagogue administrator (for those synagogues large enough to have such a position) for maintaining the health (especially the fiscal health) of the institution. That means that much of the rabbi's time must be spent with those congregants who can best help maintain the facility, that is, the richest members of the congregation. But if the rabbi is less the spiritual leader of the congregation and more the CEO of an enterprise, then the time spent with the wealthier members of the synagogue is totally appropriate, as well as necessary.

Employee or Spiritual Leader?

The other side of the rabbi's transition to CEO is that the rabbi becomes in every sense the employee of the congregation, rather than its spiritual leader. In earlier eras in America, the rabbi presumably focused on the spiritual, and was thought to lack a certain worldliness and sophistication about material matters, such as strategies for negotiations about salary and raises. The synagogue members would then assist the rabbi by providing discounts on everything from clothing to orthodonture for the rabbi's children.

Fried explains at some length the support Rabbi Wolpe received from his congregation (such as a group of members who assisted him in making the down payment on a condominium in Philadelphia after his retirement), and contrasts Wolpe's salary with the salary of one of his sons who has also entered the rabbinate. Aside from whatever personal issues might emerge from the salary discrepancies between father and son, the fact that the son makes a considerably higher salary (in fact, one of the highest rabbinic salaries in the United States) also reflects a change, in which the rabbi behaves as an employee like all other employees, negotiating for whatever salary the market will bear.

Fried also points out that congregational rabbis are now more expected to serve their congregations than to be leaders of the community. He points out that rabbis who were community leaders of the past, such as Stephen Wise and Abba Hillel Silver, are not to be found today. He attributes this to the fact that Jews now are part of all areas of American society, and that in their new roles (such as university professors and senior members of the government), they use their positions to speak publicly on Jewish issues.

Meeting Needs of Congregants

While there is truth in that observa-

tion, it is also true that there is a transformation of the role of the rabbi in relation to the congregation. The role of the rabbi as the one who sets the religious standards of the community has diminished, while the role of the rabbi as the person who meets the religious needs of the congregants has grown.

Stephen Wise once stated,"The chief office of the minister, I take it, is not to represent the view of the congregation, but to proclaim the truth as he sees it."[3] This is very different from the perspective of the search committee described in the book, which expects the rabbi to execute a vision that originates in the congregation.

In the American Jewish congregation, it is not only the rabbi, but the rabbi's family that have public roles. The tragic stroke that afflicted Rabbi Wolpe's wife Elaine is also a window into the place of the rabbi's family in the synagogue. The changing role of the rabbi's spouse, traditionally a woman known as the "*rebbetzin*," can be contrasted to some extent to the different roles played by Rabbi Wolpe's wife and the wife of the assistant rabbi. Rabbi Wolpe's wife had a more active presence in the synagogue than that of her successor.

Pastor or Administrator?

Aside from the public role of the rabbi, the pastoral role also has begun to take a second seat to the administrative function. Some of the pastoral work has been taken over by cantors, and this process is described in the book. The cantor at Har Zion continues to play a more traditional cantorial role, as a soloist in the tradition of cantors of previous eras. But the cantor also takes over some of the personal and pastoral services that had previously been provided by the rabbi, such as preparing the children for bar and bat mitzvah.

Two issues demonstrate that meeting individual needs is now a primary goal for the synagogue and for the synagogue's rabbi. The first has to do with a controversy affecting the assistant rabbi. In order to shorten the overall service, the assistant rabbi shortened the *Yizkor* service on Yom Kippur, which meant that he eliminated the congregants' opportunity to linger on pages listing the names of their departed relatives. The act of remembering a departed relative is central to why many people come to synagogue, and so rushing it to spend more time on other parts of the service showed little understanding of some of the personal reasons people attend services in the first place.

The second issue was the concern that the "synagogue down the street," Beth Am Israel (also affiliated with the Conservative movement), was attracting some of Har Zion's younger members. Most of the references are to the dynamic young rabbi at Beth Am Israel. The congregation may represent, as some Har Zion members fear, the wave of the future.

Much of the appeal of Beth Am Israel rests on the pluralistic approach to Jewish identity that is the hallmark of the synagogue. In much the same way that Mordecai Kaplan envisioned synagogues, Beth Am Israel offers multiple

ways of expressing Jewish identity, and does not treat one as better than the next. It is this recognition of the diversity within the community, as well as the quality of the rabbinic leadership, that makes the congregation thrive. Diversity makes the synagogue appealing for younger Jews who see the synagogue as a place that is designed to meet their spiritual needs. It is also the search for personal meaning that drives much of the decision making of American Jews in terms of their synagogues.

The Members Know Best?

The assumptions that the synagogue membership knows best, and that the synagogue should meet their needs, does not merely define the relationship with the rabbi. It also helps define the relation between the congregation and the larger, umbrella organizations that are supposed to support individual congregations and set the standards by which they are run.

In the case of Har Zion, the struggle between the congregation and the Placement Office of the Rabbinical Assembly (the Conservative movement's rabbinical association) plays an important part in the story, and at the same time is indicative of a willingness to challenge movement standards that would have been unthinkable a few years ago.

The particular issue was the rule that a rabbi needed a certain number of years of experience before applying to serve as senior rabbi of a congregation the size of Har Zion. The assistant rabbi, who was the candidate of at least one segment of the congregation, had not been in the field for that number of years. A compromise was reached, but the struggle reflected not only the importance of Har Zion in the Conservative movement (evidenced by its ability to bend the rules) but the changing relations between individual congregations and the larger structure of the Conservative movement.

The Challenge for Research

Fried's telling of the story of Har Zion has received mixed reviews. While some reviewers have lauded the book for its insights and the quality of the writing, others have taken the author to task for the ways in which he portrayed certain events, or because of the amount of very personal information contained about individuals who are identified by name. Whether or not this is a good piece of journalism, there is no question that this topic is one that should be studied by social scientists.

While one cannot criticize an author for not writing from a perspective with which the author is not familiar, there are reasons to assume that a social scientist would have approached certain issues in a different way. Perhaps, from the point of view of learning something more general about trends in the American Jewish community, that different way would have been a more useful perspective.

Fried is aware of a personal side to the story, but lacks the tools to see how that impacts on his journalism. This comes out in three ways. First, he does not seem to be reflective about how his

own feelings, especially about Rabbi Wolpe, affect the way he tells the story. (In the last scene, the author and Rabbi Wolpe sit together, two men mourning for their fathers, in another Conservative synagogue in Philadelphia where both now pray.) Second, he misses the more general implications, as described above, of the tale he is telling. Finally, to make the story more compelling, he both uses actual names and includes personal information that is peripheral to the narrative, at best. In doing so, he has perhaps attracted more attention to the book, but he has deflected attention from the important issues he raises.

Lack of Discretion

Fried's use of actual names in the narrative is troubling. The characters could have remained anonymous, even if some people familiar with the events described in the book could identify some of them. Much of the publicity about this book is tied to personalities, and to the fact that some of the material is just plain old-fashioned gossip. Since the book was published, the new rabbi and the president of the congregation have both been forced out, in part, one can assume, because of what appeared in the book. A study of a congregation, if it wants to rise above the level of story and gossip, should help congregations with their planning, pointing out and analyzing some of the situations and circumstances that contributed to the bad process and the eventual bad outcome at Har Zion.

What is happening at Har Zion, for all its unique characteristics, is characteristic of what is happening in many American synagogues, which is why, for whatever its weaknesses, this remains an important book. By overemphasizing what makes Har Zion unique, and focusing as much as he does on the personalities (and names) of many of the major players, Fried leaves the impression that this story could be played out nowhere else. There are unique things about the congregation, as there would be about any synagogue examined in detail, but generally, there is little in the book that could not have occurred at many other congregations.

There are, of course, challenges for the social scientist who wishes to write a similar story. Even if the individual names and some of the personal details disappear, the story does not always reflect well on the congregation. This problem exists in part because Jewish communal organizations have become the biggest funders for research on American Jews. One of the reasons that so many social scientists have focused on community surveys is that they are following the money, that is, they are often following a research agenda being dictated by those American Jewish organizations willing to fund research. This is true in the wider social scientific community as well, with the agenda being set by the government and large foundations.

Programmed Research?

The willingness of community organizations to fund certain types of research (sometimes in the very dubious hope that the same social scientists can "solve" the problems that are identified)

leaves other types of research unfunded. And, of course, it could be difficult to remain friends with people in most organizations that have been profiled.

In addition, at times, the high level of sensitivity of American Jews to anything perceived as negative can prevent a clear look at the institutional life of the community. Peter Novick's excellent discussion of the role of self-pity in the way American Jews shape their own identity in regard to the Holocaust can be extended to help explain the unwillingness of the Jewish community to accept criticism regarding most aspects of community life.[4]

Considering all this, it becomes difficult to write about the Jewish community from within in a way that is objective. The social scientist wants continued access (and continued funding) from community organizations. The public outcry that accompanied the release of the intermarriage rates from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), and the embargo of the 2001-02 NJPS (which some suspect was caused by its report of an even higher intermarriage rate), are examples of the difficulties that attend any attempt to portray the community in less than a glowing light.

Seeing the Bigger Picture

However, even with these caveats, a study of a synagogue in transition that focused more on the general issues raised and less on the specifics would not only have made this book much more useful but would have removed, at least to some extent, some aspects of the book that have brought the most criticism. Such a book would also consider the impact of changes in the way American Jews perceive the role of institutions such as the synagogue on other parts of the organized Jewish community, especially the Federation system. This would require a general understanding of the structure and organization of American Jewry, something beyond the scope of the author of this book.

Further, a study of the changing role of the synagogues in American Jewish life could also help define a new role for the social scientist within the community. Helping understand issues of structure and organization, not merely "identity" and individual behavior, could provide insights and information that would enhance the ability of the community to plan effectively.

Where Is the Synagogue Headed?

So where is the American synagogue headed? If the various observations listed in the book are added up, and we account for the uniqueness of Har Zion, the trend is toward more individualized treatment and a greater desire to negotiate every aspect of the religious experience so that it is all "personally relevant."

Is this a good thing? Yes and no. It means that individual American Jews will see the synagogue as a relevant institution, one that can meet at least some of their needs. On the other hand, it also means that the communal agenda, and the obligations of each individual Jew to the community, take

a back seat, at best, to personal agendas. In either case, we need to consider the implications as community members and leaders. And we need to pay more attention to these processes by the academic community, as well as by others who are concerned for the future of the community and are trying to plan for that future.

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1. Samuel Heilman, *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

2. In the interests of fairness, I should mention that: 1) I am part of a group of social scientists who have spent a good deal of time during the last decade working with community survey data; 2) while never a member of Har Zion Temple, I spent a good deal of time there growing up, attended Har Zion Day Camp and received a grant from Har Zion to attend Camp Ramah, so I know many of the people mentioned in the book; and 3) I am currently a member of Beth Am Israel, mentioned in the book and in this essay. Whether any of this affects the conclusions in this essay is up to the reader to determine.

3. Stephen Wise, at www.swfs.org/History.htm, retrieved November 12, 2002.

4. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Hougton Mifflin Company).

Reconstructionist Liturgy: A Window Into an Evolving Ideology

From Ideology to Liturgy — Reconstructionist Worship and American Liberal Judaism
by Eric Caplan
Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Press, 2002, 413 pages

Reviewed by Mel Scult

Eric Caplan has written an engaging, provocative book on Reconstructionism and its liturgical expression. This work attempts to examine the Reconstructionist movement and the thought of Mordecai Kaplan through the medium of liturgy. After a brief summary of Kaplan's basic beliefs, the author painstakingly examines the *Reconstructionist Sabbath Prayer Book* of 1945 (*SPB*). This analysis is followed by an equally in-depth study of the *Kol Haneshamah* series, giving special attention to the Sabbath and Festivals volume, *Shabbat Vehagim.* The book ends with an overall evaluation of these works within the context of other denominational prayer books.

Focus on Prayer

Caplan is on the money in concentrating on prayer. It is not only central to Kaplan's philosophy but also the area where he was the most active, the most innovative and the most radical. Anyone who knows the slightest bit about Kaplan's life must feel his lack of social activism, but it is more than made up for by his innovative approach to liturgy.

Though sometimes tedious in its specificity, this work is set up so that even the Reconstructionist neophyte can use it with ease. Caplan begins with a brief recounting of Kaplan's life. Since Kaplan lived a very long time (102 years), there is much to recount. Unfortunately. Caplan gives us a sense of Kaplan's life only up to the period of *Judaism as a Civilization* (1934), when what we need to understand in detail are the conditions under which the *SPB* emerged in 1945.

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Caplan needs to be careful about dating Kaplan's desire to build a new theology. The author correctly tells us that Kaplan was not happy during his tenure at his first congregation, Kehilath Jeshurun, and felt like a hypocrite because of his developing liberalism. But it is a long way from being unhappy at this time [1903-1909] to the thought that he would work out a new theology. Caplan bases his thinking here on the 1952 autobiographical essay "The Way I Have Come,"[1] in which Kaplan himself reads back into his early years his desire to build a whole philosophy. We all read back, and Kaplan is no exception. There is, however, no credible evidence from this early period itself that Kaplan had already set out to build a new theology, even though he himself recalls doing so in 1952.

Problems of Language

The summation of Kaplan's beliefs that follows the sketch of his life is well done, and will be helpful to all. Caplan clearly has done his homework; the book is, in fact, based on his Ph.D. thesis. Caplan's understanding is thorough and his presentation is precise. Unfortunately, he sometimes falls into some of the same traps that Kaplan did. In writing of God as process, for example, he uses language that is only proper to a supernaturalist conception. Caplan tells us that "God is to be viewed as process because God urges and fosters events in nature that are processes"(24).

Caplan accurately points to the emphasis on the Hebrew language as central to Jewish civilization, but Kaplan's diary reveals his profound ambivalence about the use of Hebrew. Kaplan was the head of the Teachers' Institute at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where classes were conducted in Hebrew. There were times, however, when the need to speak Hebrew got in the way of his teaching. Witness the following from the 1920s: "I feel that someday I shall create a scandal among the Teachers [sic] Institute staff by declaring war against the miserable slavishness to mere language [i.e. Hebrew] regardless of the cost in genuine knowledge that the students might otherwise attain" (Kaplan diary, December 3, 1928).

The Kaplan Diaries

Perhaps a word is in order here about Kaplan's diaries. Kaplan was the greatest Jewish diarist who ever lived. His diary consists of twenty-seven large volumes and runs from 1913 to 1978. The diary is housed at the Jewish Theological Seminary, with copies at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Hebrew Union College and in Jerusalem. The diary, so far as I can determine, appears not to have been consulted by Caplan at all, which is surprising, since the diary contains an enormous amount of material that is relevant to the study of Kaplan's thinking about liturgy. I shall have occasion to refer to some of this material as we proceed.

Caplan's consideration of the changes inaugurated in the *SPB* is astounding in its scope and detail. This book will serve as a guide for anyone interested in the way Kaplan's theology is

embodied in the liturgy. There is neither space nor would it be appropriate to comment on the details of Caplan's presentation. But a few highlights may be in order.

There is a wealth of material in this work by Caplan and he has clearly demonstrated that if we want to understand Mordecai Kaplan, then we must study his prayer books. Some sections are particularly good, as when Caplan notes the changes having to do with revelation, or when he notes that Psalm 90, with its emphasis on God's anger, was left out of the *Pesukei D'zimrah* (preliminary services).

Changes in Liturgy

Consider also what Kaplan does with "Zion" and "America," both in the *siddur* text and in the supplementary readings of the *SPB*. Caplan points out that Kaplan changed the language of the traditional prayers so that the idea of "the ingathering of the exiles" is omitted, being neither hoped for nor prayed for. Caplan cites Ira Eisenstein's suggestion that Kaplan thought it would be unrealistic for American Jews to pray for all of the Jewish people to be gathered into a single homeland. (It is worth noting that Caplan talked a great deal with Eisenstein, and shares with us Eisenstein's memory of the events and the conflicts associated with the liturgical changes.)

There is, of course, much theology embedded in the changes in the Kaplan text. Just one example will suffice: When Kaplan comes to texts that triumphantly recount the splitting of the Red Sea and the drowning of Egyptian soldiers, he inserts an interpretive version that associates God more with human freedom and deliverance from oppression than with the joyful defeat of enemies.

Though we cannot help but be impressed by the completeness of Caplan's examination of the *SPB,* there are missed opportunities and lacunae. In discussing the publication of *The New Haggadah*, for example, there is much material in the diary on the difficulties surrounding this landmark event.

Loose-Leaf Prayer Books

Another matter: In the 1930s and 1940s, Kaplan used a loose-leaf prayer book at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism before the SPB appeared. The whole notion of a loose-leaf prayer book is a wonderfully evocative symbol of Kaplan's approach to liturgy: Keep the core but make it easy to rearrange, insert new materials and delete others.

I was profoundly moved when, in examining Rabbi Eisenstein's papers in the Kaplan Archives at the RRC, I came across a copy of one of the original loose-leaf prayer books. My find confirmed another matter that is significant and that is omitted here. Caplan mentions that Kaplan included few materials authored by non-Jews in the supplementary readings to the *SPB.* It should be noted that the supplementary readings in the loose-leaf prayer book contain material left out of the *SPB*. The most notable example is a prayer composed by Kaplan built out

of an essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson. The language is from Emerson but the prayer is from Kaplan. (Kaplan notes his creation of this prayer in the diary [September 1942]; this Emerson-Kaplan prayer is reprinted in my introduction to the reprint of Kaplan's *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion.*)[2]

In the loose-leaf prayer book, the Emerson-Kaplan prayer sits next to a prayer built from an essay by Abraham Joshua Heschel. The essay, "An Analysis of Piety," appeared in 1942; the prayer is titled "The Pious Man" and may be found in the *SPB*.[3] The Kaplan-Heschel prayer is part of the fascinating story of the way in which Heschel was brought to JTS, a development in which Mordecai Kaplan played a major role.[4]

God as "Thou"

In terms of missed opportunities, there are a host of theological problems that are not fully confronted by Caplan. One of the major problems of Kaplan's liturgy is that in the *SPB,* Kaplan continues to address God as "Thou." Although he does not consider God a "cosmic ego," but rather a process or a series of processes within us and within the universe, Kaplan continues to use traditional language. Although Caplan briefly addresses this linguistic anomaly, an extended discussion of the issue would have been helpful. It was necessary to wait until the work of Marcia Falk for a creative attempt to take the personal God language out of liturgy.[5] Falk was, in fact, commissioned to do an alternative *Amidah* in one of the early versions of the Sabbath Eve prayer book, although it did not appear in the final edition of *Shabbat Vehagim.*

Kaplan believed that people could pray only if they were able to believe in what they were saying. Many questions have been raised about this assumption, both in the past and in the present. This major issue, which underlies many of the changes Kaplan introduced into the liturgy, would also have benefited from an extended analysis.

A major focus of Caplan's work is the evolution from the first series of Reconstructionist prayerbooks, edited under the direction of Kaplan, to the *Kol Haneshamah* series of new Reconstructionist prayerbooks edited by David Teutsch. Caplan rightly praises the creators of the *Kol Haneshamah* series for the very extensive readings, *kavannot* and explanations given along with the text. The series will serve as the benchmark for all future *siddurim* that want to prove themselves effective.

The New Generation

Caplan begins this part of his analysis with a fine account of the recent ideological developments in the Reconstructionist movement. He chronicles the way in which the "younger generation" has departed from classical Reconstructionism in the direction of reappropriating language amd imagery drawn from the mystical traditions of Judaism. He consistently contrasts the current Reconstructionist scene with Kaplan and the beliefs of the "classical Kaplanians."

This contrast may not be as sharp as Caplan suggests, however. Mordecai Kaplan was much more complicated than we realize, and his conceptual framework has much in common with contemporary spirituality. Caplan argues that the new Reconstructionist theology goes beyond Kaplan's belief that "God was wholly immanent" (145). Kaplan was an immanentist, to be sure, but there are many expressions of his belief in a realm that is not "supernaturalist" and yet not "naturalist," either. Though his term for this realm is cumbersome, we have not yet begun to explore fully Kaplan's concept of transnaturalism.

Witness the following in a Kaplan fragment from the 1950s: "God or Godhood is the actual power residing in the man-centered cosmos and not merely an idea or an ideal. . . . Godhood is a process which affects every aspect of human life; its transcendence, therefore, is all inclusive or infinite." Or consider the following from the Kaplan diary (October 3, 1939), where Kaplan sounds much more like Plato than like William James or John Dewey:

> . . .That the ground of all reality —mind — is the least capable of being named or described. Whatever we can know about it is not its noumenal side but [its] phenomonenal aspect. Yet we experience its reality with an immediacy which cannot belong to any of its objects. On the other hand this experience is non-[transferable] communicable whereas that of its objects is communicable.

Quest for Spirituality

Caplan does a fine job in outlining the movement of Reconstructionism from a more rational to a more affective-emotional kind of Judaism. Contemporary Reconstructionist services often include dance and music, as well as Eastern meditation techniques. Caplan is right that Kaplan is the rather staid Victorian rationalist, someone who vacationed at the ocean in a neatly pressed suit. Yet the author overstates his case when he says that, for example, rabbi-scholar Sheila Weinberg's "quest for inner peace would have worried Kaplan" (150). We would do well to remember that in Kaplan's "God as the power that makes for salvation," the emphasis was always on salvation, not on God. Salvation was to be defined as inner growth, self-realization and fulfillment. Additionally, the diary gives abundant evidence to Kaplan's emphasis on the inner life and his own quest for inner peace. If we want to measure the man by how he spent his time, the inner life was enormously important to him.

The most revealing aspect of Caplan's discussion of *Kol Haneshamah* has to do with the role and influence of Arthur Green. Green was the president of RRC from 1986 to 1993, and now teaches at Brandeis University. Green is a scholar of international reputation whose fields of expertise are Hasidism and mysticism. Green had a major input into the *Shabbat Vehagim* volume, but left the *Kol Haneshamah* enterprise in the middle.

Caplan's diligent tracing of the is-

sues (curiously found in the footnotes instead of the main body of the text) that divided Green from many of the other members of the Prayer Book Commission highlights a number of major issues having to do with liturgy and Reconstructionism. Green was willing to change much, but there were instances where he strongly advocated retaining the traditional Hebrew wording.

Tradition or Change

As Caplan reports it, one discussion was decisive — it had to do with the *Yismakh Moshe* passage in the Sabbath morning liturgy that explicitly refers to Moses at Sinai with the covenantal tablets in hand. Kaplan had omitted this from the *SPB*, and the Prayer Book Commission members were ready to do likewise, in keeping with the Reconstructionist belief that the Torah is a humanly created and historically developed text, and not the record of a supernatural revelation.

According to Green, however, the issue had to do with continuity and the essential language of Jewish prayer. "They said no [to *Yismakh Moshe*] and I said 'goodbye' . . . I cannot pray with a Jewish community that does not affirm the language of talking about revelation, creation and redemption even though I am not a literalist about any of them. That's essential Jewish language. I will not give in on this" (179).

As mentioned earlier, there is an old and honorable disagreement here that goes to the heart of the Reconstructionist enterprise. Kaplan was, and his latter-day Reconstructionist followers are, committed to the proposition that we ought not say one thing and mean another. Green is not the first to challenge this assumption, his point being that prayer language is largely mythic and poetic, and that the rules of precision in language cannot effectively guide discussions of language that is grounded in the heart as much as in the head.

Inconsistencies

The Conservative approach to this problem was championed by Rabbi Robert Gordis (who headed the Rabbinical Assembly prayer book commission of the 1940s): The traditional Hebrew should be kept and the English might be used to reflect a more contemporary understanding. Kaplan often thundered against this approach, which he considered to be dishonest. While the creators of *Kol Haneshamah* are not all classic Kaplanians, with regard to the issue of "saying what we mean and meaning what we say," they mostly followed the master — although Caplan correctly notes that *Kol Haneshamah* restores many poetic and mythic images that the 1945 *SPB* excised.

Inconsistency also creeps into the feminist aspects of *Kol Haneshamah*. The new prayer books go far beyond Kaplan's *SPB* in this regard. In a number of instances, alternatives are given for male God language so that the congregants may choose which version of a prayer they prefer. There are instances, however, when the traditional

male God language is left in the Hebrew text though the English is changed. One senses that this Hebrew/English split still held sway for certain venerable passages; as Reena Spicehandler reports, "There was a real hesitancy to change the Hebrew in a radical way because of the antiquity of the tradition" (221).

Continuity in Change

In Caplan's summation, he rightly points out that though there is a different flavor to *Kol Haneshamah*, there are significant elements of continuity with the Kaplan liturgy and that "a committed classical Reconstructionist can still pray comfortably from the text of *Kol Haneshamah*" (294).

No other American Jewish denomination has received such a sustained scholarly treatment of its liturgy and ideology. Eric Caplan has written a very significant work that adds crucial information to our understanding of Kaplan and the Reconstructionist movement and is a significant resource in deepening our understanding of both. In analyzing the departures of *Kol Haneshamah* from the traditional *siddur* as well as from Kaplan's *SPB*, Caplan helps make us conscious of what we are doing and what we believe in as Reconstructionists.

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1. Mordecai Kaplan, "The Way I Have Come," in Ira Eisenstein and Eugene Kohn, *Mordecai M. Kaplan: An Evaluation* (New York: Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, 1952).
2. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), xix.
3. *Sabbath Prayer Book* (New York: Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, 1945), 424.
4. Mel Scult, "Kaplan's Heschel: A View From the Kaplan Diary," Conservative Judaism, Summer 2002.
5. Marcia Falk, *The Book of Blessings* (San Franciso: Harper San Francisco, 1996).

Musings of the Master

Communings of the Spirit: The Journals of Mordecai M. Kaplan, Volume I, 1913-1934
Edited by Mel Scult
Detroit, Wayne State University Press and the Reconstructionst Press, 2001, 558 pages

Reviewed by Neil Gilman

It has long been known to students of American Judaism that throughout his adult life, Mordecai M. Kaplan kept a comprehensive, nearly daily diary. With the publication of this first volume of over 500 extracts (approximately 25 percent of the total material from 1913-1934), Dr. Mel Scult, Kaplan's biographer, deserves an outpouring of gratitude from all of us who care about the development of American Judaism in the 20th century, scholars and laypeople alike.

In his preface to this remarkable collection, Scult remarks that "above and beyond everything else, the diary is a record of [Kaplan's] thoughts about himself." How true! But in writing about himself, Kaplan also records his feelings and judgments on the range of issues and personalities that dominated the international, American and Jewish scenes during the first decades of the past century.

Wide Range of Concerns

Kaplan makes observations on the War; the rise of communism; the depression; Zionism; Jewish education; the charge of dual loyalties; the rabbinate and rabbinic education; Reform, Orthodox and Conservative Judaism; Ethical Culture; and Jewish life on the campus of American universities. In addition, Kaplan reflects on his contentious career at the Jewish Theological Seminary, his family life, his struggle with his inner demons, his professional aspirations, his tribulations with the congregations he served, his writings, and the evolution of his thought. The diaries also include substantial extracts from Kaplan's writings, outlines of his lectures and much much more.

And the personalities; what a gallery of portraits! Appearing here are Solomon Schechter, Cyrus Adler, Bernard Revel, Rabbi Moses Zevulun Margolies (the RaMaZ), Chaim Weizman, Louis Brandeis, Bialik, Tchernichowsky, Max Kadushin, the Benderly Boys, Louis Ginzberg, Louis Finkelstein (who appears with increasing frequency as his role in the Seminary administration becomes more promi-

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nent), an assortment of Seminary students, later to become his rabbinic colleagues (notably Solomon Goldman, Simon Greenberg, Robert Gordis and his son-in-law to be and closest disciple, Ira Eisenstein) — and finally, one of the few to earn his admiration, Shalom Spiegel.

Roots of Kaplan's Thinking

And there is still more. The very first sentence of the very first entry (dated February 24, 1913), from an outline of lectures delivered before the Harvard Menorah Society, reads: "Religion is primarily a social phenomenon." There, in germ, is the essence of Kaplan's revolutionary notion that Judaism is centered around the sense of peoplehood, with religion serving as a function of peoplehood. Eventually, the notion that Judaism is a "civilization" begins to appear. That notion, proclaimed in a 1923 booklet published by the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, is enough to have the booklet condemned by his colleagues on the faculty of the Seminary, because "it made no mention of religion or theology."

But theology is everywhere in this collection. We now have an indispensable resource for tracing the evolution of Kaplan's theology. We follow, almost entry by entry, his struggle with an alternative to the notion that God is a supernatural Being. On January 15, 1931, he summarizes "years of thinking": "God to me is the process that makes for creativity, integration, love and justice. The function of prayer is to render us conscious of that process . . . I am not troubled in the least by the fact that God is not an identifiable being . . . Nor am I troubled by the fact that God is not perfect. He would have to be static to be perfect. Nothing dynamic can be perfect."

Tensions With Tradition

On the issue of revelation and the authority of Torah, an entry dated June 2, 1931 is a detailed analysis of the devastating impact on the traditional version of revelation posed by biblical criticism. It was originally designed to be an address to the Rabbinical Assembly, but a week later, he notes that the lecture was never delivered, partly because "I might get myself in trouble with the Faculty who might even go so far as to ask for my resignation."

He returns, again and again, to one of the more frequent questions asked of those of us who teach Kaplan: How can we pray to a God who is not a Being? A related question, why should we observe *mitzvot* that are not divine in origin, is discussed in an entry dated August 16, 1929 — the clearest exposition I have ever read of why Kaplan replaces the notion of commandment with that of folkway. Because he is often accused of neglecting this issue, it is somewhat astonishing to find that Kaplan is obsessed by the challenge to God posed by human suffering. The canard that Kaplan was not a theologian should now be decisively put to rest.

Aspirations and Anger

But at the heart of just about every

page of the diary is Kaplan himself. First, his professional aspirations: his back-and-forth negotiations with an astonishingly patient Stephen Wise about resigning from the Seminary and joining the faculty of the Jewish Institute of Religion (JIR), and, more briefly, with Julian Morgenstern about moving to the Hebrew Union College. Kaplan's dreams for and gradual disillusionment with the Jewish Center, which he founded and then left for the Society for the Advancement of Judaism (and his perpetual dissatisfaction with that congregation's development), are described in detail. More than once, he toys with entering a career in business.

But most vividly, these pages capture Kaplan's rage — that is the only appropriate term — at the culture of the Seminary, and his treatment at the hands of the administration and faculty of that institution to which he was to devote more than half a century of service. Scult's detailed Index (indispensable for a volume of this kind) lists about fifty separate entries on JTS, many of multiple pages. For those of us, like this writer, who were affiliated with that school during and after Kaplan's tenure, these entries have an addictive quality. We turn the pages, waiting for one more outburst, and Kaplan never disappoints.

The portraits of the main cast of characters are acerbic. Solomon Schechter "used to wither the souls of the students with his ill-timed jests about rabbis and their callings." Cyrus Adler's remarks at the Seminary's 1917 opening exercises were "conventional and rambling." They revealed "how little imagination the man possesses." Louis Ginzberg talks in a "nasty satirical squeak." His arguments on behalf of Talmud exasperate Kaplan: "the few living sparks of practical purpose were smothered by the ashes of his archaeological interests." The Seminary faculty is guilty of "bibliotry, the worship not only of the book but even of useless manuscripts as though the salvation of Judaism depended upon them," which "undermines the self-respect of the majority [of students and graduates] who have not the time for those esoteric and irrelevant studies."

Despair at the Seminary

A portrait of the November 17, 1931 faculty meeting begins with "How I loathe those Seminary Faculty meetings! The moment I enter the room every part of me turns into raw flesh and every move of my colleagues somehow agonizes me," and goes downhill from there! Two colleagues read books, one the morning *Times*. Boaz Cohen "sits and stares." Ginzberg "expects everybody to take notice of him." Alexander Marx "begins to work on his pipe."

Nor are the students spared. They cheat on examinations despite the honor system. They dawdle between classes. Not only are they frivolous, the majority admit that they cannot pray, that the term God is empty of content for them and that they see in the ministry "nothing but an occasion for preaching nationalism and social service." But Kaplan shows much understanding for their anger at the curriculum, which has little to do with the rabbinic func-

tions they are to undertake in their careers. Each member of the faculty teaches the problems raised by his research in his own discipline, and considers that material indispensable to the rabbinate, leading Kaplan to conclude "On that assumption, even a ten year training would scarcely suffice." *Plus ca change !*

Kaplan and Finkelstein

But of course, the core of the tension at the Seminary was theological. It is most clearly traceable in Kaplan's evolving relationship with Louis Finkelstein. On December 10, 1922: "[Finkelstein's] star is in the ascendant just now, a fact that I would gladly welcome were it not for his taking a reactionary stand against an honest intellectual approach to the problems underlying Jewish belief and practice. I see in him a useful recruit to the forces of Jewish Jesuitism."

In another context, "[Finkelstein] has absorbed a good deal of the scholarly virus of cynicism from the Seminary atmosphere." For a while, the two studied together, but Finkelstein decides not to continue because Kaplan has a tendency to make him "work in ways that are not natural to him." Kaplan reassures him that he has no interest in doing his thinking for him, and they reconcile.

Astonishingly, Kaplan consults Finkelstein, of all people, about Kaplan's desire to omit *Kol Nidre* from the Yom Kippur service since it is "entirely unspiritual and unworthy of a place in the service on the most solemn day of the year." It makes for "mummery and hypocrisy." Finkelstein remains "obdurate, but his wife seemed inclined to agree with me." (The *Kol Nidre* issue was to haunt Kaplan for years. At the SAJ, he eliminated it in 1925; then, in the face of objections from congregants, reinstated it with modifications.)

The conflict with Finkelstein comes to a head in 1932, when, over Finkelstein's vigorous objections, Kaplan is elected president of the Rabbinical Assembly. Finkelstein fought Kaplan's election because "he is sure that my election will give the Yeshiba (sic) crowd a weapon with which to fight the Seminary and the Seminary graduates." Kaplan, for his part, is satisfied that his election "will put an end to the policy of having the Seminary sail under the Orthodox flag." When the results of the election are announced, the students who waited outside the room for the results of the vote "raised a shout that was heard all over the place."

Resignation and Reaction

Kaplan did, in fact, resign from the Seminary in 1927. His letter of resignation focuses on his attempts to develop an ideology for Conservative Judaism that would distinguish it from Orthodoxy and from Reform, and would "reckon courageously with the established conclusions of comparative religion and biblical criticism." The opposition to his views within the school prompted him to join Wise's JIR.

News of Kaplan's resignation spread, and drew a unanimous resolution from

the Executive Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly, pledging to oppose his resignation and a "vitriolic" letter to Cyrus Adler from Seminary students. Adler never presented the resignation to the JTS Board, but did meet with Kaplan for two hours, after which Kaplan withdrew his letter. The substance of that conversation is included here. Kaplan's final comment on that discussion: "At bottom Adler and I do live in different universes of discourse." Nonetheless, Kaplan remained at JTS until 1963.

Surprising Sense of Failure

To this reader, at least, the stunning revelation in this material is Kaplan's persistent sense that he was a failure. There is a startling contrast between Kaplan's public presence — the authority that he projected and the passion with which he advocated his positions — and the inner Kaplan — with his doubts and sense of incompetence as a thinker, a father, and a rabbi, and the depression that seems to have hovered on the periphery of his self-awareness.

By his own account, he is one of those people who combine "mediocrity with inordinate ambition." He is "crestfallen" because he forgot a verse in the Book of Job, or because he had worked all day in the hope of writing an address in Hebrew but had to give up. (There are many references here to his frustration over his failure to master modern Hebrew.)

He is "a failure not only in the Seminary and in the SAJ but even in my own home." He chronicles with merciless honesty his repeated quarrels with his daughter Judith over her Jewish practice. He is "doomed" to live the rest of his life "in a sort of prison made for me by my aspirations which separate me from my own wife and children."

On April 12, 1928: "I have been very much in the dumps of late. The longer I live, the more alone I feel. I have not a single friend, or companion in the world with whom I can share my interests and problems." His frustration with his writing makes him feel "like a woman who constantly miscarries." But three months later, on vacation in New Jersey, reading and writing in the warm sun, he can say. "This is a great life!" (Two delightful tidbits: one entry that deals in a roundabout way with his sexual impulses, and one about a brief foray into a vaudeville show. Not unexpectedly, Kaplan turns both into a meditation about the human condition.)

Kaplan records the gradual decline in his religious observance. He has stopped putting on his *tefillin*. Apart from reciting the Grace After Meals, he has stopped praying regularly. He uses a pen on Shabbat "when unseen." His reason dictates that he "emancipate himself" from the traditional bonds of Sabbath observance, but his moral sense upbraids him for being either "a coward or a hypocrite" for allowing people to believe that he is still a traditionally observant Jew.

Kaplan's Legacy

This volume ends, appropriately enough, on a sunny note. *Judaism As*

A Civilization is published, and Judith Kaplan and Ira Eisenstein are married. Today we know the rest of the story. Kaplan did become one of the most influential shapers of American Jewry, did produce an impressive body of scholarly work, did assemble a body of loyal colleagues and collaborators and, most important, did integrate a theology, an ideology and a program into one coherent whole. His dream that this might become Conservative Judaism was never realized, but it did become Reconstructionism (a term that curiously never appears in this volume), and many of his original ideas have now become mainstream Jewish thinking.

By the time this writer studied with Kaplan in 1955 and 1956, the Seminary was a very different school. The rabbinical student body was no longer composed of drop-outs from Yeshiva University, but rather of *ba'alei teshuvah* (the newly observant) from Ivy League schools. Abraham Joshua Heschel had replaced Kaplan as the magnet that attracted us to the school, and Kaplan's fights were less with the administration and faculty and more with an increasingly traditionalist student body. His classes were contentious affairs. He finally retired in 1963; in retrospect, he probably should have left some years earlier, as his colleagues had urged him to do.

We are indebted to Mel Scult for allowing us to listen in as Mordecai Kaplan pours out his thoughts, feelings and concerns. Scult's scholarship, his taste and his own fascination with the material are evident on every page. The volume is enriched by Scult's introduction to Kaplan's thought, a biography, concise footnotes identifying the personalities Kaplan encounters, a number of charming photographs, and the generous index.

Scult's judicious and representative choices of diary entries enriches our understanding of Kaplan. But at the end, we are left to wonder — if this material represents only 25 percent of Kaplan's entries for that twenty-year period, what remained on the cutting room floor? And what lies in store for us with Volume Two ?

Perspectives on Prayer

Major Philosophers of Jewish Prayer in the Twentieth Century
by Jack J. Cohen
New York, Fordham University Press, 2000, 240 pages

Reviewed by Peter S. Knobel

Can prayer be revitalized in the 21st Century? The leadership of the streams of Jewish life believe that communal worship is essential to the spiritual health of the Jewish people. All agree that a prayer service is most successful when the worshipers experience themselves as part of a community. The religious streams are publishing new *siddurim*, and, congregations and *havurot* are producing their own. Programs for synagogue transformation like Synagogue 2000, under the direction of Lawrence Hoffman and Ron Wolfson, and the efforts of consultants like Sidney Schwarz, are opening new doors to participation.

New music is being written drawing on contemporary musical motifs. Multiple musical instruments are now heard from the *bima* of synagogues that permit instruments during prayer. Clapping, swaying, chanting and meditating as part of communal worship are becoming commonplace in worship settings, where just a few years ago such activities would have been considered scandalous.

Words and Beliefs

The words of a *siddur* express a community's belief system, describe its values, its fears, its hopes and its dreams. Throughout Jewish history the words of prayer have been of great importance and a matter of ongoing debate. Like the *Tanakh* and the Talmud, the text of the *siddur* became canonical, and to keep the text vibrant and vital the community developed strategies to solve the intellectual and spiritual dilemmas that arise with canonical texts.

Elaborate commentaries explicated hidden meanings, mystical techniques lifted the worship to a new spiritual plane and rote recitation challenged the worshiper to infuse the text with meaning. The struggle between the fixed text (*keva*) and meaning (*kavanah*) is a continuing battle. What are we to do with the words? Recite them with new meaning or revise them to speak to our age? Is prayer a mantra in which the act and not the words is the main point, or an expression of belief in which we should say what we mean and mean what we say? In *Major Phi-*

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losophers of Jewish Prayer in the Twentieth Century, Jack Cohen seeks to explore these questions.

His formidable task is to explicate clearly, briefly and yet comprehensively the work of major 20th century Jewish thinkers on prayer. He devotes chapters to Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, Mordecai Kaplan, Aaron Rote (Reb Arele), Eli Munk, Abraham J. Heschel, Jakob Petuchowski, Eugene B. Borowitz, Lawrence A. Hoffman and contemporary feminist thinkers.

How Revitalize Prayer?

Cohen's goal is the revitalization of the synagogue service. To that end, he does not merely review the abstract ideas of each thinker, but assesses whether a philosophical analysis of prayer will, in fact, help Jews to pray. If people could only learn to think about prayer in a way that is consistent with the rest of their thinking, prayer would be important and meaningful.

The text for Jewish prayer is the *siddur*, whether in one of its traditional editions or in one of its modern revisions or reconstructions. A central question for Cohen is: Can we extract unrealized meaning from traditional formulae, or must we provide new words that reflect our contemporary spiritual reality?

The thinkers in this volume, as might be expected, divide into two basic categories in response: those who would leave the traditional text unchanged and develop strategies for making them meaningful, and those who would revise the text by deleting, changing and adding words, phrases or whole passages, while keeping the basic structure intact.

Starting With Naturalism

Cohen is a rationalist whose own theology is largely indistinguishable from that of Mordecai Kaplan. It is Kaplan's rationalism and naturalism that, if properly understood and applied, Cohen believes provides the best hope for the revitalization of communal prayer. He seeks to defend Reconstructionism (as formulated by Kaplan) against the criticism that naturalism leaves no room for genuine prayer.

Cohen's underlying assumption is that theology and philosophy do matter, and that sustained reflection should help revitalize worship. Having reviewed and rejected most of the positions he has analyzed, he turns to a sustained argument in defense of religious naturalism, which Cohen argues is not merely secular humanism, although it shares many of its features.

But to a degree, Cohen is caught in a paradox. He wants to refute the accusation that Reconstuctionism is not religious and, at the same time, he does not want to alienate secular humanists. These secular humanists are often committed to many of the same perspectives and ideas that characterize the religious humanism of Reconstructionism, even if they choose a different vocabulary or do not participate in organized Jewish religious life.

The Goal of Prayer

Cohen begins by demonstrating that

his understanding of God is both rational and realistic. He brackets the questions of creation and of life after death. He expresses awe for the beauty and order of the universe. Human life is finite — a fleeting journey between life and death. Human beings are limited, yet endowed with creative powers. Common prayer can provide the humility and courage to live without the hope of supernatural intervention.

He begins his own chapter, "Can Prayer Be Revitalized?" by citing a well-known quotation from the Baal Shem Tov: "If after you've prayed you are the same as before you prayed, why did you pray?" (200). The goal of prayer is to change the worshiper. This, Cohen believes, is what is common to all of the thinkers whose work this book surveys. Common prayer is about becoming a complete human being and, in our own particular refraction of this universal quest, an ideal Jew. But the unanimity of a common goal quickly breaks down around the meaning of the terms "complete human being" and "ideal Jew."

Cohen affirms that the *siddur* must be an ethical document. Therefore, prayer must help us realize that "Before God, all are equal" (207). He asserts that it is this principle that can become a yardstick for judging our prayers. He rejects prayers that speak of a natural superiority of birth, divinely given differences among peoples and what he understands to be the particularist superiority reflected in the concept of chosenness.

Prayer and Worship

Cohen believes there is natural physical law and, at least as I understand him, natural ethical law as well. For him, "God is not a Being but a Process that comes to consciousness in the human soul" (218). Prayer becomes, then, not a communion with God, but an act of self-transcendence. Prayer aids in the pursuit of Truth, while reminding us that we can only have partial truths that are constantly subject to revision. "The religionist will worship; secularists are likely to confine themselves to the study of humankind and nature, perhaps in a spirit no less pious than that of worshipers" (218). The paths are parallel and sometimes intersecting.

Prayer and worship are not the same thing to Cohen. "Prayer was and is only one method by which mortals hope to feel God's presence and remind themselves of how much they are dependent upon forces beyond their ken" (220). Worship, on the other hand, is "the manner in which humans go about searching for and relating to whatever it is in the cosmos that can help us successfully cope" with the reality of both our finitude and our creative potential (218). Prayer may take place within worship, but worship is not a necessary precondition for prayer. Worship is about community and a community's aspirations. For Cohen, the community finds its meaning in its historical connection to the ongoing adventure of the Jewish people.

Beyond the Words of Prayer

Cohen offers his own prescription for the revitalization of Jewish communal worship. His key points are: 1) The

focal point of Jewish worship can and should remain the framework of the traditional prayer service. 2) Mind and soul, intellect and emotion, articulation and silence, meditation and study are all necessary components of worship. 3) Communal worship can succeed only if interpersonal relationships are warm and caring. Cohen correctly notes that merely changing the *siddur* will not necessarily lead to a revitalization of prayer.

In this regard, it is also interesting to note that each of the non-Orthodox movements in Jewish life have sought recently to articulate their ideology, theology or principles in a cognent and comprehensive manner — in statements as well as in *siddurim* — that show each movement to be divided between those who seek to maintain the principles of the founders and those who seek renewal and change. Even if there is agreement that the words should be changed, how they should be changed remains open to debate.

Lawrence Hoffman, who after first devoting himself to textual studies of the *siddur* has become an articulate as well as an astute advocate for worship change, offered similar insights more than fifteen years ago. Hoffman's approach is decidedly non-theological, although it has clear theological implications.

My own studies with Daniel Schechter, in a grant from the Nathan Cummings Foundation and Lilly Endowment, entitled, "Lay Involvement in Liturgical Change," noted the proliferation of congregationally authored prayer books as a sign that Hoffman's understanding of worship as a quest for meaning and community was correct. How worship was performed and how community was constituted were often more important than the words that were recited. Hoffman has even suggested that we now live in a post-print age in which the concept of a *siddur* as we know it may be obsolete.

Treatment of Thinkers

By and large, Cohen strives to be fair and dispassionate about the thinkers whose work he surveys. An exception, however, is his chapter on Eugene Borowitz, which is more critical and, to this reader, even disturbing. Cohen seems almost miffed at Borowitz' critique of Kaplan's understanding of transcendence. Cohen's criticism seems more like a personal assault on Borowitz rather than a more objective analysis. I suspect this may be because Borowitz, as the leading living Reform theologian, has been one of the greatest challengers of Kaplanian naturalism, whereas the other thinkers discussed do not directly address, let alone critique, Kaplan's thought.

While Cohen's acknowledgment of the issues raised by feminism is to be applauded, the chapter devoted to feminist thought is disappointing. The challenge of feminism goes much deeper than debates about God language and the inclusion of women in the *siddur*. It is about the basic structures of Judaism. Issues of hierarchy, and the different ways in which women and men account for their experience, beliefs and relationships, must all be taken into account. Cohen, to his

credit, takes feminism seriously, but he curiously fails to cite either Judith Plaskow or Rachel Adler, who are among the most important Jewish feminist theologians who have devoted much thought to prayer and worship.

Gaining Clarity

I have a great appreciation for Jack Cohen and this book. It has helped me crystallize a number of things: 1) Kaplan's rationalism and naturalism can still move and touch many who desire an expression of Judaism that is intellectually in touch with modernity and the enlightenment (although Cohen's own defense of Kaplan was for me too polemical); 2) the *siddur* must be multivocal and speak to Jews whose belief structures, life situations and aesthetic sensibilities are diverse; 3) The head can prevent the heart from praying; 4) renewal, or to utilize Cohen's term, "revitalization of Jewish worship," is an urgent necessity.

Major Philosophers of Jewish Prayer in the Twentieth Century will be a useful text for anyone wishing to confront an array of important thinkers on prayer. The issues raised by these thinkers, and by Cohen's discussion of them, should be carefully considered by those who lead prayer as well as by individual worshipers. All who seek to compose a *siddur* should be aware that the *keva* that they set on paper must be infused with the multiple *kavanot*. Finally, Cohen reminds us that the *siddur* is an ethical document that teaches what it means to be good human beings and good Jews.

The lucid manner in which Cohen presents these complex materials and his own perspectives and proposals are to be appreciated. I know of no other book where these diverse perspectives are so easily accessible. For this, we owe Jack Cohen a debt of gratitude; his book is an invitation to further study.

Pluralism Limited

Dignity of Difference
by Jonathan Sacks
London, Continuum, 2002, 216 pages

Reviewed by Neil Amswych

I cannot deny that I approached Jonathan Sacks' new book, *Dignity of Difference,* with some skepticism. While at university, I had the wonderful opportunity of interviewing him on his role as the Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogues (the largest affiliated Orthodox movement in Britain), and his passion for Judaism and careful attention not to incriminate himself with his words was very apparent.

Years later, much has changed. Seven years ago, he described the then-recently deceased Rabbi Hugo Gryn, one of the leading Reform rabbis in the United Kingdom, as "one of the rabbis who destroy the faith," and noted that Progressive Jewry has no enemy equal to the Chief Rabbi. Normally such things should be consigned to the past as a bitter learning experience, but *Dignity of Difference* opens up old wounds in ways that Jona-than Sacks could not have envisaged.

Recognizing Difference

The premise of the book is that a post-September 11 world needs to make a radical change, and that such a change must come from the great faiths. According to Sacks, the "loyal adherents" of religious traditions now need to reassess their theology, not only to recognize difference, but to embrace it as a theological and social necessity.

The problem, of course, is that most of us already have embraced it! Therefore, looking over the spectrum of Jewish practice, it seems as though Sacks' "loyal adherents" must be only the Orthodox who have not yet fully embraced the principle of difference. Pluralism for Sacks exists only outside Judaism; pluralism within is clearly not on the agenda.

While one cannot but admire the effort that has been made here, the entire premise of the book is, in some sense, completely false. Moreover, with this pluralism in mind, it is puzzling that Sacks can state, without moral difficulty, that God chose one people (the Jewish people) and commanded it to be different in order "to teach humanity the dignity of difference"(53).

While, in the prologue, Sacks informs us that his book is not written only for Jews, it is clear that whichever

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religious group he might have in mind, he addresses himself to the more conservative religious devotees — including those found among the Jewish people. He does so in the eloquent and informed manner that has led some to hail him as Britain's greatest religious thinker today.

Early on, Sacks states that "in heaven there is truth; on earth there are truths" (64), or, "in the course of history, God has spoken to mankind in many languages: through Judaism to Jews, Christianity to Christians, Islam to Muslims — this means that religious truth is not universal" (55). Without doubt, these are the boldest theological statements to have come from the United Synagogues that I can remember, although they are not the sum total of what Sacks has to teach.

Range of Knowledge

Sacks demonstrates his knowledge of economics and history in explaining why Judaism supports the free market as the greatest tool for relieving world poverty. However, such a market needs to be a moral one, or else it is bound to lead to the proliferation of the grave consequences already apparent worldwide — poverty, illiteracy and war. By relating biblical ethics to the free market, Sacks produces a seven-point plan as a personal suggestion to ensure the success of the free market for all.

Sacks also articulately observes our current passage through the fourth information revolution (the previous three being the invention of the alphabet, writing and printing). The immediate access to knowledge, he suggests, not only radically alters our lives, but is an essential human right, and therefore forces us to work toward total global literacy in an effort to ensure human dignity.

One cannot fail to observe Sacks' moral passion, and his awareness and descriptions of social and economic crises will surely move any reader. It is disappointing, therefore, that such an admirable platform should be tinged with startling naiveté. While the biblical concept of the Jubilee, which Sacks promotes, is beautiful in theory, it is evident that any attempt to reinstate it in our time would be impractical.

Selective Citations

It is also disappointing that Sacks' choice of biblical sources is so selectively used to support his agenda. As an example, Sacks proudly refers to Ruth as the Moabite ancestor of King David, suggesting that her not being Israelite reveals the divine importance of difference. But Sacks fails to inform his readers that Ruth is seen by the rabbis as the prototypical convert to Judaism — the first person formally to renounce difference and to assimilate into similarity with the Jews!

Similarly, while acknowledging that the "God of the Hebrew Bible is a particularist" (56), loving one people and giving them a particular destiny, he also states that God loves all the nations in God's own way. As nice a sentiment as this may be, it fails to take into account God's promise to the Israelites to drive the Canaanite nations into the hands

of the Israelites for slaughter (Deut. 7:1-5), one of many examples that show the danger of difference as held by the Torah. (In Sacks' defense, he acknowledges that every tradition has its "abrasive passages" and notes, in a surprisingly liberal vein, that "no tradition is free from the constant need to reinterpret" [208].)

Sacks uses the biblical narrative of Babel in his argument for pluralism. Before this narrative, he claims, God tries to work with a universal world order, but it continually fails — in Eden, with Cain and Abel and with Noah's generation. It is only after the Tower of Babel that humanity is dispersed and diversity becomes the divine preference. Intriguing as this suggestion is, and as admirable as these sentiments are in such difficult times as our own, the Bible's aforementioned intolerance of other nations in so many places calls into question Sacks' conclusion.

Tolerance and Fundamentalism

Ironically, despite Sacks' affirmation of difference and pluralism, it is intolerance that is the ultimate undoing of this book, because of events surrounding its publication. Sacks' attempt to speak to a modern readership — including references to Spinoza, to the era of the dinosaurs and to theologies of divine preference for pluralism — is in some sense incompatible with a movement ultimately controlled by fundamentalists.

Shortly after publication, *Dignity of Difference* was branded heretical by a few Orthodox rabbis and Sacks decided to amend the key pluralistic statements referenced earlier. Indeed, it was not just the tolerant, pluralistic passages that he amended — in the new edition he no longer even mentions the scientific age of the earth, in apparent deference to fundamentalists.

If Sacks' disgust at contemporary fundamentalism is admirable, then his compliance with fundamentalist demands following publication can only be deplorable. For British progressive Jews, this retraction of religious tolerance is surely another step back on the road to intracultural tolerance. Sacks surely opened a theological and interpretational door for many members of the United Synagogues that could have led to a blossoming of intracultural activities and thought. Now, with key pluralistic passages rescinded, he has firmly slammed shut this door, to the detriment of the British community at large.

Forced Retraction

However, the negative effects of his retraction go beyond the Jewish community: Some Muslim readers have criticized the Jewish community for apparently forcing the author to remove tolerant passages. To have published *Dignity of Difference* in the first place showed how the Cambridge-educated Sacks finally caught up with interfaith dialogue — a necessity, considering his role as Jewish President for the Council of Christians and Jews (a non-political, interfaith organization seeking to combat prejudice and promote

understanding). To then retract the book's most important passages while maintaining that nothing of substance has been removed is why some now say that Chief Rabbi Sacks stands for very little, and why they believe the book is very damaging.

The retraction of the pluralistic statements of this book does not in any way help Sacks' movement or his office. This retraction does not diminish the significance of this book, although it regrettably overshadows the important ideas Sacks hoped to communicate. The debate and retraction stand as a testament to the political wranglings in the United Synagogues, and the difficulty of holding the position of the Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogues, particularly for someone as brilliantly literate as Sacks. The retraction will also be a testament to Sacks' inability to stand up to more extremist pressure groups.

I hope, though, that *Dignity of Difference* also stands as a significant first public attempt within the United Synagogue to embrace other faiths from an Orthodox Jewish position, and as a prompt to other Jews to take positive action regarding pressing issues, such as poverty, the free market and universal human rights. Whether one responds positively or negatively, the book and the controversy surrounding it suggest it will remain an important text for British Jewry for some time.

Mapping the Spiritual Journey

The Journey Home; Discovering the Deep Spiritual Wisdom
of the Jewish Tradition
by Lawrence A. Hoffman
Boston, Beacon Press, 2002

Reviewed by Marsha Pik-Nathan

Books on spirituality abound; walk into any mega-chain bookstore-with-café and you are guaranteed to see a section devoted to the topic — often replete with books featuring a cosmos motif on the cover. Walk a little farther into the Judaic section; what is surprising is not the number of books on the topic, but that such an increasingly large number of books are not about the usual concerns of Jewish life: text, history, ritual, prayer, life cycle — but rather about concerns of the Jewish spirit.

Until fairly recently, such concerns were considered to be out of the mainstream of Jewish interest and focus — in fact, were considered at best heretical (if taken seriously at all), and at worst, frivolous. Sometimes such books were dismissed as being simply imitative of the ease with which Christians speak of God, and Eastern traditions in general, of the ethereal.

Legitimate Jewish "stuff" has always been considered to have a "real world" focus: how to "do Jewish," or how to "think Jewish." But books that focus on the realm of the spirit? On relationship to God? Those belonged in neighboring civilizations and bookshelves.

Embracing the Spiritual Quest

We now see a radical shift toward the incorporation of the spiritual into our contemporary Jewish canon, and indeed a blossoming of Jewish attention and writing on matters spiritual. With the abundance of offerings, how can we discern which works truly offer something of value, something that enables us to view the life of the spirit as an important arena of Jewish inquiry?

Lawence Hoffman's *The Journey Home: Discovering the Deep Spiritual Wisdom of the Jewish Tradition* is a book clearly worth embracing in this emerging canon. Hoffman, professor of liturgy at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, is widely known in Jewish academic circles for his prolific and erudite writing on liturgy and

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other aspects of Judaism. His work has formed the basis for the establishment of "Synagogue 2000" and its work in helping synagogue communities to develop their capacities for becoming the spiritual centers of the new millenium.

Hoffman's audience is the well-educated lay seeker who needs both a "Judaism 101" primer and a sophisticated consideration of how the basic building blocks of Judaism inform the creation of a deep and rich spiritual life. If one does not know a thing about Judaism, this book will teach a great deal. If one is steeped in Jewish knowledge, this book offers the challenge to take traditional Jewish forms and approach them from a place that is not academic and yet not, as some say disdainfully, "touchy-feely." Hoffman's presentation is accessible and interesting to a wide variety of Jewish thinkers and seekers.

What is Jewish Spirituality?

In 1975, after having given a week-long seminar on the rituals of Passover, Hoffman was approached by a student who asked him, "What is the spirituality of the seder?" He was challenged; not once in the week had he discussed anything "spiritual." From that point on, he became interested in the spiritual quest — what did it mean, and how did people go about it?

Hoffman is clear: For him spirituality is not about the "non-visible" — the world of auras and crystals and the like. Rather, it is about the very stuff of this earth. The challenge is to find the spiritual not in "other-worldy" places and longings, but in the model so well exemplifed by Moses' encounter with the burning bush — i.e., to be able to recognize that the very ground on which one is standing is holy — and to take off one's shoes and wriggle one's toes in the mud in celebration of its truth.

To apprehend fully that this ground on which we stand, cook, have sex, eat, plant, pray and sleep is holy is to discover the deep spiritual wisdom of Judaism suggested by the book's title. Hoffman delineates the uniquely Jewish paradigms by which we become spiritually attuned creatures, any one of which could be a book-length discussion in itself.

Seven Spiritualities

He posits seven spiritualities that infuse our world and can serve to connect us to the Divine within ourselves and our communities: a spirituality of metaphor, stewardship, discovery, landedness, translation, suffering and community. I cannot do justice in a short treatment of this book to the extraordinary richness with which Hoffman explores each of these. Rather, I can give some gems to whet your appetite.

Hoffman begins his exploration by reminding us of the importance of "reasonable spirituality" — a search not for angels, but for the meaning of, as he says, "connecting the dots" of our lives. What could be more frightening than seeing our lives as a string of random, unconnected events — strange enough when the events are good, but certainly

a frightening thought when the events are difficult or cataclysmic. This focus on connecting our experiences into a shape we can discern, name, and celebrate is the stuff of spirituality. In Hoffman's words:

> I would say that spirituality is our way of being in the world, the system of connectedness by which we make sense of our lives, how we overlay our autobiography in the making with a template of time and space and relationship that is vastly greater than we know ourselves individually to be. It is the way we dimly find our way to how we matter, the maps we use for things like history and destiny, the way we take a jumble of sensory data and shape it coherently into a picture, the way discordant noise becomes a symphony of being, the way we know that we belong to the drama of the universe. It is the wonderfully enchanting but equally rational way we go on our way of growing up and growing older in the mysterious business we call life (17).

The spirituality paradigms Hoffman posits are essentially vehicles we can use to connect the dots of our lives — to make meaning where meaning could very easily be bypassed, and life experienced as disconnected from Divinity.

Desanctification

In a beautifully constructed chapter on the role of blessings, Hoffman also manages to give us an erudite explanation and history of *berakhot*, of the development and role of Jewish texts in our tradition, and even a brief but understandable history of the role of sacrifice and its spiritual descendent, prayer.

What really stood out to me, however, was his radical notion that to bless is actually to "desanctify" something. Usually, prayer is understood as focusing on the holiness of an event, action or encounter (the *Shehebianu* blessing, for instance, calls our attention to the holiness of a unique moment). Hoffman stands this understanding on its head — it is by removing these acts or encounters from the category of pure holiness that "we render them fit for human enjoyment"(64). By blessing them, we bring them, as it were, to our level. We apprehend them so we can partake of them — but we cannot do this when they exist solely in God's realm.

Only after we recite the blessing over wine can we drink it; in so doing, its essence transfers over from God's world to ours. It is our responsibility not to stand afar from the manifestations of God's goodness, but on the contrary, to drink in the abundance, to eat joyfully of it, to marvel at the wonderous sights and sounds that we can note if we work to develop Heschel's "radical awe" — the sense that each and every moment of being is truly miraculous. It is this imperative to interact with God's world that prompts us to blessing, to engagement. This is stewardship — the fulfillment of the commandment to till and tend this earth.

Tilling and tending begin with noticing.

Additional Dimensions

The chapter on the "Spirituality of Discovery" is a wonderful survey of Torah writ large, taking the reader through an impressive thesaurus of terminology related to Torah and its study — almost a mini *Back to the Sources* for the uninitiated. Addressing the spirituality of "landedness," Hoffman considers the primal Jewish attachment to the particular space on earth that is Israel, apart from its geopolitical implications. In his chapter on the "spirituality of translation," Hoffman offers us an excursus on meta-thinking — what does it means to "think about thinking" about matters spiritual? His focus is perhaps best characterized by these words — his own rendition of the Reconstructionist maxim: "the past has a vote but not a veto:"

> Many people mistakenly believe that in order to think spiritually they have to swallow uncritically the literal truths they find in traditional writings. The writings, however, are like diary entries at earlier intersections of the vertical and horizontal lines, where their religious tradition has met other historical eras. Reading old diary entries and knowing they are part of our own evolving life story as members of a single tradition is not equivalent to thinking the same thoughts all over again and feeling the same way about what we wrote when we were younger. Spirituality is the conviction that the old diary entries continue to engage us; they define our way of seeing the world; by rereading our traditional affirmations of faith, we rethink the world using the themes that our religion has bequeathed us. But using the colors and models that past generations gave us is not the same as settling for a photocopy of the same pictures they drew (131).

Hoffman concludes that "spiritual thinking" is

> the attempt to say more about the universe than science can, without saying anything that science cannot at least grant as possible and maybe even probable. . . . It connects us with our past, but speaks to our present. It is intellectually sophisticated, but not academically distant from what matters to us most (159).

Meaning and Suffering

As the book nears its end, Hoffman applies his analysis to our most human dilemma — how to find meaning in suffering. Taking us on a journey through biblical theology and a consideration of the Book of Job, he explores the rabbinic ambivalence on matters of suffering. Looking again at a variety of meaning-making schemes — from psychoanalysis to essayist Annie Dillard — Hoffman asks us to consider "connecting the dots" as the

only way to make sense of suffering. He also demonstrates the importance of the metaphors one uses to describe the image that is formed of those connections.

In this way, Hoffman invites us to explore the "kingdom of night" (as he terms the realm of suffering) in our own life and the lives of others. Jewish mourning rituals are explored as guideposts to how to handle the inevitable intrusion of "night" into our world.

Role of Community

The book concludes with a consideration of the role of community in spirituality. Hoffman gives us a historical overview of Jewish community and how it formed itself in America, from the earliest Sephardi immigrants to New York, through the German Jewish immigration in the mid 1800s and onward. He considers the importance of what each group of Jewish settlers brought to America, and considers the diverse cultures of German and Eastern European Jews coming together in this country, as the backdrop for understanding the complexity of "peoplehood" in the context of modern American life. This chapter ends with a critical assessment of Mordecai Kaplan and of the importance of Arthur Green's *tikkun* of Kaplan's rationalism.

Hoffman explores the Jewish demographics of the 1950s and '60s in the context of the rising suburbanization of American Jewry and the institutionalization of Judaism. He sees the rebound effect of decades of soulless Judaism in the contemporary search for Jewish spirituality as the quest for lives that have meaning, while understanding that there cannot be a facile return to the "good old" Jewish days, either in theology or in practice.

> At its core spirituality is the sense that things all fit together despite momentary fears that they are falling apart. It posits connectedness where there seems to be none. The search for spirituality is the yearning for shape where old contours have eroded . . . Part of us wants to return to the old days where families could be counted on and the streets were safe for walking. Another part of us, however, knows that the new world of elective identity is not all bad. It does, however, require that we find something to hold us together and connect us beyond ourselves, as we go about choosing the paths that will take us through the labyrinth of life(210).

It is this search for "something beyond ourselves" that constitutes the essence of the "journey home." We would do well to take Hoffman's erudite and sophisticated road map with us as we seek to connect the dots along the way.

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